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Kate Chopin's Contribution to Realism and Naturalism: Reconsiderations of W. D. Howells, Maupassant, and Flaubert.

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KATE CHOPIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO REALISM AND NATURALISM:
RECONSIDERATIONS OF
W. D. HOWELLS, MAUPASSANT, AND FLAUBERT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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Abstract

No one has previously undertaken a detailed examination of Kate Chopin's documented intertextuality with writers such as W.D. Howells, Hamlin Garland, Maupassant, and Flaubert. My purpose is to examine Chopin's works in the context of writers with whom she interacts and so to reveal her impact on the development of literary realism and naturalism.

My study reveals that, though her mature writing eliminates sentimentalism, she never abandons romance elements residual from her youth. Her typically subjective narrator removes narrative authority, intensifies our involvement with characters, and validates the marginalized voice. Darwin and the philosophers temper her Catholicism, yet she maintains a sense of the divine and perennial nature of the force of love. Her acknowledgement of the influence of other writers reveals her sense of continuity as a means of understanding our selves.

In Chopin's first novel, *At Fault*, she borrows a subplot of Howells's *A Modern Instance* to respond to the idealism Howells inveighs against even as his novel upholds it. From Howells's perspective, love as the basis for action is illusory and ideal. Chopin, understanding love as inherently human rather than as an ideal or abstract concept, critiques Howells's notion that, lacking love, the ideal of marriage should be upheld.

Appreciating Maupassant's freedom of expression, Chopin departed from American models and responded instead to his stories. Richard Fusco reveals in detail how Chopin emulated Maupassant's structures. Within those structures, she more

efficiently expresses the force of love in her stories. We can use Fusco's schema to examine Chopin's conscious dialogic engagement as she focuses not on Maupassant's larger concerns with an uncaring bourgeoisie, but on narrower concerns, typically within the female consciousness.

Chopin finally returns to the novel form with *The Awakening*, a reconsideration of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Emma Bovary experiences no awakening, retaining romantic misconceptions. Edna awakens to the need to escape temporal limitations. Chopin pleads for the romantic vision and the necessity of understanding one's inner reality.

Under the influence of these writers, Chopin demonstrates continuity, forms a link between French and American realism and naturalism, and contributes to the movement toward "soft" naturalism.

Introduction

Old Natchitoches

It wasn't so very long ago,
Tho' I can't remember and neither can you—
A couple of hundred years or more
When the moon was old and the town was new.
O! the people and places that ne'er stand still!
They've none of the wisdom that gathers riches,
In the dreaming old town at the foot of the hill
That is old as the moon and the world and as wise.
(Dec. 1898, *Miscellany* 37)

In becoming a mature artist, Kate Chopin was influenced by literary masters on both sides of the Atlantic. During her brief writing career (1889 to 1899), she responded deliberately to American writers Howells and Garland and French writers Maupassant and Flaubert. Unfortunately, *The Awakening* (1899), probably inspired by Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), sparked controversy that ended her career and placed her in virtual obscurity until she was rediscovered by Daniel Rankin (1932), by Cyrille Arnavon in France (1953), researched later by Larzer Ziff (1966), and boosted to canonical status by Per Seyersted (1969). Since that time, feminist writers in particular have embraced her for her bold assertion of female concerns and desires.

Chopin articulated her feminist concerns while she interacted mainly with male authors in America and France. In her internal dialogues with these authors, she consistently placed a female consciousness at the center of her response. Her emphasis and concerns became immediately distinct from those of the male writers she answered.

Chopin's choice of authors upon whose works to model her own, first in America, then in France, was influenced largely by her historical placement. Chopin lived in America during "the age of Howells" (Carter, "Realism" 390) and the growth

of literary realism. Early in her development, she learned principles of realism from Howells's novels and criticism. An admirer of his writings, she wrote and sent to Howells a response to *A Modern Instance* (1882), a novel she entitled *At Fault* (1890) (Seyersted, *Chopin* 53, Toth, *Unveiling* 118).

Chopin's French heritage also contributed to her development. Encouraged to speak French at home in St. Louis by her great grandmother, Victoire Verdon Charleville, Chopin read in the original French the great masters of French realism and naturalism. Additionally, her marriage to Oscar Chopin, a Creole whose father was born in Paris, and their subsequent moves to New Orleans and then to Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, were catalysts in her development. Not only could she read and translate the French masters, she lived among French-speaking Creoles and Acadians, who were to provide themes and characters for her stories. Perhaps as one result of her placement within this French culture, she was to relate less often to American writers as her writing matured, choosing instead to hold as models and inspiration the great French works she read by Maupassant and Flaubert.

In fact, Chopin was reading Maupassant in French as early as 1888, even before writing her first novel, *At Fault*. As Margot Sempreora notes, however, not until after translating eight of Maupassant's stories that Chopin titled the "Mad Stories" (1894-1895) was she able "to enter his being and look out through his eyes" (Sempreora 86). After translating the first two stories (1894), Chopin, concentrating now exclusively on the short story form, began holding a more deliberate dialogue with Maupassant. Although the stories she chose to translate were essentially misogynistic, Sempreora argues that from them Chopin, for her own stories, "'got' . . . an insistent impulse to make women visible to

themselves” (88). Although the resemblance in themes and structures to Maupassant’s stories is striking, an examination of her stories reveals that Chopin substituted suggestion and brevity for Maupassant’s often elaborate exposition and layering. Within this structure, Chopin consistently focused on a subjective apprehension of the female consciousness.

By the end of the decade, Chopin departed from the short story form long enough to write her final novel, *The Awakening* (1899). Her finest work, *The Awakening* was likely a response to Maupassant’s friend and *maitre*, Flaubert. Most critics agree that Chopin, “well acquainted with the classics,” probably read Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary* in the original French language (Seyersted *Chopin* 86). In her work, however, she reveals Edna’s consciousness subjectively, while Flaubert, adhering rigorously to conventions of objective realism, maintains a detached, external perspective on Emma’s consciousness. In revealing her character from a more internal, subjective perspective than is possible from Flaubert’s objective perspective, Chopin invites the reader to apprehend Edna’s concerns. Such an internal perspective leads Chopin inevitably to conventions of romance that Flaubert strictly avoids in *Madame Bovary*.

Although Chopin’s interaction with various authors is well-documented, within current criticism we find little attention to detailed discussions of its influence on her career. The present study will show in more detail than has yet been shown how Chopin’s work evolved in a dialogue with these writers. Drawing on Bakhtin’s idea of a “dialogic engagement with another’s discourse” (9), Suzan Harrison has done a similar study of the “intertextuality” in the writings of Virginia Woolf and Eudora Welty both as a “strategy that women writers use to appropriate and revise cultural

narratives that seem to marginalize and silence women” and as a “way of appropriating ‘masculine’ genres and raising questions about the ideologies implicit in those forms” (19, 20).

Similarly, Margaret Donovan Bauer has explored the “intertextuality” (18) of Ellen Gilchrist’s work with that of male writers Hemingway and Faulkner and female writers Kate Chopin and Katherine Anne Porter. She has examined “dialogic relationships between [Gilchrist’s] works and the works of others as well as echoes of other writers’ works in her stories” (21). Bauer, attributing the term “intertext” to Michael Riffaterre, defines it as the group of texts a reader may connect to the text at hand (18). Her focus, she says, is “reader-centered,” as opposed to the more “author-centered” “influence studies” of Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (177 n 13). Bauer draws on Bakhtin’s idea that “every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that anticipates it” (Bauer 21, Bakhtin 280, emphasis Bakhtin’s). Bauer argues that “an analysis of a . . . writer’s work *should* include . . . the relation of the work to what has preceded it, indeed has apparently played some role in its existence in being” (21, emphasis Bauer’s).

Since Chopin’s own papers indicate a conscious dialogue with various authors, a detailed study of that “intertextuality” seems appropriate and consistent with current critical practices. To date, a majority of Chopin’s critics and scholars have examined biographical, feminist, local color, or racial elements, but they have largely ignored “what has preceded” Chopin’s work in the historical development of literary realism and naturalism in America and France. Within current criticism, we find no useful study of naturalism near the turn of the century as it was becoming less deterministic, an

element important to a placement of Chopin as a naturalist. Nor do we find a comprehensive study of differences in French and American naturalism that would have had an impact upon Chopin, and perhaps Henry James, more than other authors less attuned to the French intellectual milieu. A discussion of the historical placement of her works within that movement opens a new perspective on her systematic development. My study will add such a discussion to current criticism.

Emily Toth has extensively examined autobiographical elements. She finds evidence that many of Chopin's characters are drawn either from acquaintances or from female ancestors. In the "ancestor stories," ending with "Athénaïse" (1896), Chopin turns to "women of her family [who] had through widowhood evaded in some ways the claims of family, community, and husbands" ("Chopin Thinks Back" 25). Toth also examines Chopin's dialogic relationship with such writers as Howells and Maupassant (*Unveiling* 118, 123). For example, she discusses the influences of Maupassant's "Solitude" on Chopin's "The Night Came Slowly," and of "Suicide" on *The Awakening* (*Chopin* 272).

Per Seyersted dismisses autobiographical elements in Chopin's writing, arguing "it is only in the case of four items that we today have proofs or indications that her writings were taken more or less from life" (*Chopin* 217 n 4). Nonetheless, Seyersted corroborates literary influences on her writing by offering, for example, a useful comparison of Chopin's "Regret" (1894) and Maupassant's "La Reine Hortense" (1883) (Seyersted, *Chopin* 125-29).

Larzer Ziff notes details of locale as influencing Chopin's writing:

The community about which she wrote was . . . far more French than American, and Mrs. Chopin reproduced this little world with no specific

intent to shock or make a point . . . and since [the conditions of civility] were so French, a magazine public accustomed to accepting naughtiness . . . on those terms raised no protest. (297)

Ziff also corroborates Chopin's interaction with other writers, noting that her "admiration for Maupassant especially inspired her to try short stories" (296), and that she "obviously was indebted to [Flaubert] . . . for the masterful economy of setting and character and the precision of style" that she achieved in *The Awakening* (300).

Barbara Ewell, besides delineating similarities in Chopin's and Maupassant's short stories (*Chopin* 19), points out the importance of Chopin's early religious training to her career, linking it specifically to her French heritage. She explains that the "commingling of sense and spirit is indigenous to Catholicism and preoccupied many nineteenth-century Europeans, but it was certainly not congenial to Protestant America. . . . Chopin's own background . . . had sensitized her to the sexual dimension of the spiritual" (*Chopin* 114). She refers to "Two Portraits," but we might note two additional stories, "Lilacs," and "A Vocation and a Voice," that illustrate such a juxtaposition of spiritual and physical. In "A Vocation and a Voice" (1896), for example, we find a struggle between the sexual and the spiritual, significantly, in a male consciousness. When the boy grows to physical maturity, he abandons his spiritual "vocation." Finally, "he was conscious of nothing in the world but the voice that was calling him and the cry of his own being that responded. Brother Ludovic bounded down from the wall and followed the voice of the woman" (*Works* 546). Brother Ludovic re-enters the secular world with Chopin's implicit approval.

Chopin's earliest biographer, Daniel Rankin (1932), probably was the first to note that "Chopin was not imitative in the narrow sense of being completely under the

sway of any one writer, but the range of her debts is wide: Flaubert, Tolstoi, Turgénieff, D'Annunzio, Bourget, especially de Maupassant, all contributed to her broad and diverse culture" (174). However, when he argues that *The Awakening* is "the analytical study of a selfish, capricious woman" (171) in a novel that "follows the current of erotic morbidity that flowed strongly through the literature of the last two decades" (175), he indicates unwittingly that Chopin would have been perhaps ahead of her time even in the 1930s.

Toth, Seyersted, Ziff, Ewell and Rankin offer valuable insights into historical reasons for apparent autobiographical and literary influences on Chopin's work. Other critics focus instead on feminist, local color, or racial considerations. Following Seyersted's landmark publication of Chopin's *Complete Works* (1969), she has been discussed most often as a feminist writer. The feminist perspective illuminates Chopin's perception and portrayal of the "feminine" consciousness as it also reveals what is simply "human" in that consciousness. Simultaneously, other scholars have examined local color elements that reveal the essential nature of place and culture to her writing and thus beg a discussion of historical and geographical placement. As treatment of race was becoming more of an issue in criticism, Chopin's handling of race was scrutinized. Scholars of Chopin's post-Civil War handling of race necessarily examined her historical and geographical placement. All these perspectives are essential to an understanding of Chopin in the context of her time and place. Additionally, an examination of literary conventions as they were evolving from realism to naturalism and a discussion of Chopin's documented intertextuality with other authors within this movement is essential to a complete contextual understanding.

A major early and continuing approach is to examine Chopin as a feminist writer. In a comparison of *The Awakening* and *Madame Bovary* that I will refer to in chapter five, Susan J Rosowski calls *The Awakening* a female “*bildungsroman* or apprenticeship novel,” the title indicating implicitly that Edna “must learn . . . [the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life] in terms of herself as a woman” (313). In the feminine “theme of awakening,” the “movement is inward, toward greater self-knowledge . . . [with the] results . . . that for a woman such an art of living is difficult or impossible” (313).

Margit Stange, exploring self-ownership as “central to feminist ideology of the second half of the century,” argues that in *The Awakening* “Chopin’s dramatization of female self-ownership demonstrates the central importance of the ideology of woman’s value in exchange to contemporary notions of female selfhood” (479). Ivy Schweitzer, agreeing that “legally, [Edna] is [Léonce’s] possession” (166), also notes that with Edna’s awakening comes her “pursuit of a selfhood” (170). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese adds that “Chopin does hint that late-nineteenth-century marriages cast women as the objects of others rather than as the free subjects of their own fates. Thus she introduces Edna through her husband’s gaze” (35). Similarly, Wendy Martin contends that *The Awakening* is, in part, “about the emerging individuality of a woman who refuses to be defined by the prevailing stereotypes of passive femininity but who lacks the psychological resources and training to resist the tradition of enforced passivity” (17).

E. Laurie George argues that *The Awakening* is Chopin’s “feminist critique of male centered language and her exploration of an alternative women’s language” (53). Before her awakening, Edna fits the “acculturated mold.” By the second half of the

novel, however, “Edna’s speech and demeanor . . . reveal that she has adopted certain masculine traits to gain power denied her” (57). Dale Marie Bauer and Andrew M. Lakritz go on to say that Edna must find a new language outside the proscriptive patriarchal culture: “Only by articulating her own stance . . . can she overcome . . . the repressive demands made on her by society. Edna’s gradual awareness of her voice . . . is crucial to her resistance” (Bauer and Lakritz 51). Barbara Ewell notes that Chopin’s “life and fiction interact in oblique, but perhaps typically female, ways,” concluding that Chopin’s “explicitly feminine perspective challenges those paradigms [of sexual identity] more profoundly and thus more threateningly than any vision before that of the modernists themselves” (Ewell, *Chopin* 91).

Marianne Dekoven goes a step further, arguing that Chopin was a “female modernist” (19) as differentiated from “male modernists,” replacing the masculine “fear of hegemony . . . [with] a fear of punishment for a desire for the new, a desire felt to be unallowable” (20). DeKoven bases her argument on such modernist characteristics as “doubleness,” or “simultaneous assertion and denial of rebellious impulses” (20), characteristics apparent in “Chopin’s ambivalence about empowering Edna” and her “shifts from positive to negative imagery” (24). An example of such shifting imagery appears in her sea imagery:

[Edna] stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known. . . .

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. (*Awakening* 113)

Words with positive connotations, such as “invited,” “delicious,” and “new-born creature,” are alternated with negatively connotated words, such as “at the mercy,” “strange and awful,” and “coiled like serpents.” Such “doubleness,” according to DeKoven, suggests that the author is at the forefront of “female modernism.”

Other critics insist that Chopin consistently speaks for individual concerns as well as for feminine concerns. Elaine Showalter notes that *The Awakening* “marked a significant epoch in the evolution of an American female literary tradition” (“Tradition” 34). She explains, however, that

Chopin was not an activist. She never joined the women’s suffrage movement or belonged to a female literary community. Indeed her celebrated St. Louis literary salon attracted mostly male journalists, editors and writers. . . . Chopin did not wish to write a didactic feminist novel. . . . She distrusted the rhetoric of such feminist best-sellers as Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). (42)

In fact, she asserts, Chopin rejects the “conventions of women’s writing. . . . Whereas the sentimental heroine nurtures others and the abstemious local color heroine subsists upon meager vegetarian diets, Kate Chopin’s heroine is a robust woman who does not deny her appetites” (43). Paradoxically, Chopin’s departure from feminist conventions seems to have contributed to an “epoch in the evolution” of feminine literature.

Margaret Culley also contends that Chopin “was never a feminist or a suffragist; in fact she was suspicious of any ideology. She was committed to personal freedom” (“Context” 117). Similarly, according to Bernard Koloski, Chopin “understands ‘human existence,’ one of her favorite phrases, as driven by a yearning for something she often calls ‘rights of existence’” (*Short Fiction* 81, emphasis added).

Larzer Ziff places Chopin’s writing beyond the confines of women’s fiction, noting that in the 1890s, “The woman novelist was trapped by her affiliations to her sex.

. . . The condition of women inescapably had to be the material of her art” (283).

Unfortunately for these writers, “their works are marred and sometimes destroyed because they cannot break free of the marriage pattern” (285), a pattern not broken until “Kate Chopin and Theodore Dreiser came near obliterating themselves by following their art where society insisted it should not go” (286).

Per Seyersted argues that, “though what could be called her feminist stories are so greatly important to Kate Chopin’s *oeuvre*, they are rather few in number, and the rest of her writings show a detachment on the relationship between the sexes” (“On ‘The Storm’” 147). In “The Storm” (1898), for example, Chopin speaks “not consciously . . . as a woman, but as an individual. Even her previous writings had been free from misandry and from suggestions of either sex being superior to the other” (148). Seyersted places Chopin among those “rare” authors “who could write on the two sexes with a large degree of detachment and objectivity” (148).

In line with these critics, Susan Lohafer points out that not only Athénaïse, in the story of that name, but also Cazeau experiences growth: “Cazeau, too, has his burgeoning of consciousness” (127). After Cazeau’s ‘awakening,’ he writes a letter to Athénaïse in which he recognizes “the woman he loves as someone with a will of her own, with the power to make a choice, and with the right to be a voluntary and reciprocal partner in the union of marriage” (127-28). Barbara Ewell goes on to say that,

by the final scene, Cazeau’s own deeply romantic nature, his blunt integrity, and his sensitivity are equally manifest. But the unfolding of Cazeau and other characters is as gradual and even misleading as the processes of self-discovery themselves” (*Chopin* 112).

Cynthia Griffin Wolff, too, indicates that growth can occur despite gender. In

The Awakening, Edna

interests us not because she is “a woman,” the implication being that her experience is principally important because it might stand for that of any other woman. Quite the contrary; she interests us because she is human—because she fails in ways which beckon seductively to all of us. Conrad might say that, woman *or* man, she is “one of us.” (242, emphasis Wolff’s)

A summary of feminist criticism on Chopin seems finally to suggest a departure from feminine to human concerns, a shift that paradoxically contributed to the evolution of feminine literature.

A second consideration of Chopin’s works is in the context of local color. John May, placing *The Awakening* in the context of local color, contends that the novel “is not simply about a woman’s awakening need for sexual satisfaction that her marriage cannot provide; sexuality in the novel represents a more universal human longing for freedom, and the frustration that Edna experiences is a poignant statement about the agony of human limitations” (113). May bases his observation on the essential nature of “local color” and “related symbolism” in the novel (113). Focusing particularly on “sensuous imagery,” he notes that “sensuousness is a characteristic feature of the setting, a product of climate and the Creole temperament” (113). He classifies *The Awakening* as a local color novel, since “the identity of the setting is integral to the very unfolding of the theme, rather than simply incidental to a theme that could as well be set anywhere” (117).

Other critics also place Chopin’s stories in the context of women’s local color. According to Bernard Koloski, “From her first published story to her last, Kate Chopin was thought of in her own times as a regionalist, a local color writer, an artist

committed to capturing in prose the folkways and speech patterns of Louisiana” (*Short Fiction* 12). Local colorists, including Chopin, he suggests, “not only affirm the local culture they are describing but also confront the larger, dominant society they are writing for . . . urg[ing] a society . . . to integrate it into the whole, to give it a better position than it would have if their fiction had not been written” (12).

Although Chopin’s fiction has decidedly local color elements, other critics place it beyond the realm of conventional local color. Donna M. Campbell concedes that “women’s local color fiction has undergone increasing attention since the 1980s” (5). Nevertheless, she asserts, local color was displaced by the naturalists and “occurred as part of a broader shift from realism to naturalism, which in turn marked the passing of a nineteenth-century sensibility and the emergence of a twentieth-century one” (5).

Campbell delineates characteristics of local color that might help us identify Chopin’s place in the movement. Local color, Campbell explains, celebrates “continuity,” “affirm[ing] what is usable about the past and the ordinary” (7) as it “resists change, externally by encouraging the isolation of the region from the outside world, and internally by emphasizing community rituals” (8). It often “insists on continuity” as “elderly people . . . hold the community together by their tales of the old days,” and on “physical and spiritual endurance in the face of adversity . . . rather than defiance” (8). These principles, she says, were overturned by the naturalists, including to some extent, I would argue, Chopin, who is inclined to acquiesce to both change and a modicum of defiance. For example, in *At Fault*, Thérèse accepts changes brought on by Reconstruction with only “a tearful farewell to the silence” (*Works* 744), while in “Ma’ame Pélagie” (1892), the title character is finally persuaded to give up her neurotic

clinging to the past: “‘Adieu, adieu!’ whispered Ma’ame Pélagie” (238). Additionally, Edna Pontellier overtly defies “*les covenances*.” Campbell goes on to say that “[l]ocal color works . . . frequently disregard . . . violence, youth, romantic love [among others]” (21), elements often apparent in Chopin’s fiction. Elaine Showalter notes, in fact, that “*The Awakening* is insistently sexual, explicitly involved with the body and with self-awareness through physical awareness” (“Tradition” 43).

Although Campbell finds local color elements in Chopin’s “studies of Louisiana’s French population” (19), she concludes that both Chopin and Edith Wharton, her contemporary, “attempt [the] fusion of naturalism and local color. . . . The naturalistic influences seem unmistakable, especially in the opposing themes of endurance and degradation” (148-49). Edna, for example, “follows a path of sensual self-indulgence similar to that of men like Vandover and Theron Ware, and the end of her naturalistic ‘degeneration’ is the same as theirs” (149).

Richard Brodhead amplifies Campbell’s definition of local color:

It requires a setting outside the world of modern development, a zone of backwardness where locally variant folkways still prevail. Its characters are ethnologically colorful, personifications of the different humanity produced in such non-modern cultural settings. Above all, this fiction features an extensive written simulation of regional vernacular. (115-16)

Employing this definition, we find even more elements of local color in Chopin’s fiction about Creole and Acadian culture. Yet when Brodhead mentions Chopin, it is as a contributor to the “fin de siècle European writing” published in the *Chicago Daily News* in the 1890s. The list of publications includes works by “Verlaine, Mallarmé, Yeats, Shaw, Maeterlinck, as well as such cognate American works as Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*” (3).

Mary E. Papke calls most of Chopin's 1891 stories "fairly conventional historical and local color tales" with "traditional and reconciliation themes and conventional endings" (52). She contends, however, that "Ma'ame Pélagie" and "Désirée's Baby" (1892) "mark her break" with conventional local color as she focuses more on "alienation" and "the black shadows on the social margins" (53). Barbara Ewell places Chopin's "break" with local color somewhat later, after "Athénaïse" (1895): "Chopin's work throughout the remainder of 1895 reaffirms her gradual abandonment of local color even as it reflects her continued fascination with the later themes of duality and sexual repression" (*Chopin* 112).

A third consideration, Chopin's handling of race, has also proven controversial to critics. Winfried Fluck, in her study of *At Fault*, noting local color particularly in the beginning of that early novel as well as in Chopin's handling of African-American characters, contends that her "rather stereotyped treatment of the plantation's child-like 'darkies'" shows that Chopin was "complicit with her culture" (225).

Barbara Ewell adds that, as a "product of her society," Chopin displays "racial bias" (*Chopin* 67), though she concedes that "Nég Créol" (1896) is one of Chopin's "finest and most sensitive portrayals of an African American" (72). Helen Taylor, too, faults "Chopin's racism" and her "stock portraits of (mainly comic) black figures" (156):

Like Stuart, Chopin provided stereotypical black characters and black dialect to satisfy that nationalist project of northern editors. . . . As with other southern women writers, black suffering, slavery and oppression are all linguistically and thematically appropriated for white women. The complexity of blacks' own lived experience is sacrificed. (156-57)

Many other critics, however, insist that Chopin avoids stereotyping race and dialect in her complex and sympathetic handling of characters as individuals regardless of race. One example, in *At Fault*, is Aunt Belindy's oxymoronic naïve wisdom that seems to prefigure Faulkner's Dilsey, who "seed de first en de last" in *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner 311). Aunt Belindy, apparently with Chopin's voice, tells Lucilla, the aspiring "religious," "'Religion—no religion, whar you gwine live ef you don' live in de worl'? Gwine live up in de moon?'" (*Works* 841).

Toth commends Chopin's ability to look "through the eyes of a woman of color at a time when Grace King and Ruth McEnery Stuart were still writing about happy slaves and tragic octoroons" (*Chopin* 222). Bonnie James Shaker notes the complexity of racial issues in Chopin's work, attributing it to its placement in the diverse culture of Louisiana:

Chopin's local color fiction mediates Louisiana's specific complex social and racial history through . . . narrative construction of racial difference for Louisiana peoples of African American, Native American, and French American ancestry. (117)

Richard Potter points out the "individualization of character" among many of Chopin's African-Americans. He comments that Chopin probes "the psychological implications of slavery," conceding that though some minor characters are stereotyped, most characters are "distinct human beings with individual lives" (55). He asserts that Chopin, with her "soft delicate touch," was "certainly not in step with her times" (57-58). Violet Harrington Bryan discusses Chopin's revolutionary handling of the sensuous African-American male:

Chopin feels free to describe the noble and sensuous form of Mézor [in "La Belle Zoraïde"], so rarely handled in American literature of the period, "the stately movements of his splendid body swaying and

quivering through the figures of the dance,” the Bamboula, in Congo Square. (Bryan 55, *Works* 304)

Bernard Koloski comments that in “*Désirée’s Baby*,” Chopin illustrates the “potential for tragedy inherent in fantasies of racial superiority,” as Armand is revealed to be “that which he hatefully accused his wife of being” (*Short Fiction* 24). Koloski commends Chopin for exploring “with sensitivity the painful desperate position of African Americans in the South both before and after the Civil War and documenting some tragic results of whites’ attitudes toward race” (44). On the other hand, Ellen Peel faults handling of race in that story:

The text directs sympathy less toward black characters than toward characters on the margin between black and white. . . . The implication is that being black deserves no particular sympathy unless a person was once considered white. The broader effects of race and its relation to slavery remain unexamined. (64)

Although Seyersted agrees that some of Chopin’s African-American characters are “stereotypes,” he asserts, with some qualifiers, that she

treats them as people and with *little condescension*. . . . Her picture of the Negro is . . . *somewhat limited*. But it is truthful as far as it goes, and she *often* succeeds in making him into a full, convincing human being. (*Chopin* 79-80, emphasis added)

The debate will continue, indicating that Chopin is being read in various ways. The fact that questions exist attests to her greatness. Were she strictly a feminist or local colorist, she would likely have remained obscure.

Amidst the wealth of criticism on feminism, local color and related racial concerns lies a smattering of criticism on Chopin as a naturalist. As previously mentioned, Donna Campbell discusses Chopin’s attempt to fuse naturalism and local color (148). Peggy Skaggs points to elements of feminism and local color in *The*

Awakening, but recognizes also that “the tendency toward naturalism is clear enough . . . to grasp its basic deterministic philosophy, as Edna finds that her life must be lived within [unyielding] socioeconomic and biological boundaries” (83).

Karen Simons asserts that the tendency of critics to “focus on gender/self limits the scope of Chopin’s vision in *The Awakening*” (243). Rather, she argues, “It is not, finally, society that infringes on her autonomy and individuality, but the very forces of nature and the very existence of the children” (249). Steven T. Ryan concurs, adding that Chopin’s fascination with Darwinism influences her portrayal of “Edna’s sexual awakening as a product of a biological imperative” (254). He discerns an “odd tension between freedom and determinism” (254), a tension we will explore in chapter three as a characteristic of Chopin’s evolving, less deterministic naturalism.

Barbara Hochman contends that *The Awakening* “nearly exemplif[ies] the ‘naturalistic’ plot of individual decline, with its concern for the pressures of environment and circumstance, and its focus on forces (both inner and outer) beyond the control of the characters” (212). She explains that Chopin “reject[s] a plot in which marriage becomes the ground of closure (as it does in the work of . . . William Dean Howells)” (212). Instead, she argues, Edna journeys “through progressive isolation to death (as in such naturalist works as *L’Assommoir*, . . . *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, *McTeague*, *Sister Carrie*)” (212). In current criticism, Hochman explains, “The naturalist connection is rarely emphasized, perhaps partially obscured by the emphasis on Chopin . . . as [a] trailbreaker in women’s fiction” (232 n 6). Hochman insists that Chopin “sought authorial status beyond the confines of ‘women’s’ writing” (212).

Nancy Walker adds that Chopin “makes it clear that Edna Pontellier is largely unaware of—and certainly unconcerned with—the reasons for her actions and that her awakening is a realization of her sensual nature, not of her equality or freedom as an individual” (61). Rather, “Chopin uses the style of the naturalists in depicting a fated character” (62). Walker asserts that “Edna has allowed her decisions to be made below the conscious level, so that they surprise even her, and she gives little thought to the consequences” (63). Walker concludes that “Chopin writes *The Awakening* from the perspective of a naturalist, giving Edna little control over her own destiny. . . . She is controlled by her emotions, not by men or society” (63).

Virginia Ross contends that Dr. Mandelet’s observation “underscores the Schopenhaurian conviction, adopted by Chopin, that romantic love is a stratagem of Nature to assure continuity of the species” (58). Comparing Dr. Mandelet to Chopin’s friend, Dr. Kolbenheyer, Ross questions

just how comforting the cynicism of Schopenhaur could have been to a young mother of thirty-four who had recently lost her husband and her mother. According to Schopenhaur, the individual, deceived with the prospect of his own pleasure, is ironically the victim of the will in nature for whose ends he is unconsciously striving. . . . The more exalted sentiments of love are motivated by instinctual biological drive. (62)

Yet while Dr. Kolbenheyer urged Chopin to read Schopenhaur, as my discussion of philosophical influences on her works in chapter two will show, we never get the sense that Chopin shares the pessimistic notion of one who loves as the “deceived . . . victim” of nature. She never suggests in her works that she has wholly “adopted” Dr. Mandelet’s “Schopenhaurian conviction.”

Gay Barton comments on the significance of Dr. Mandelet’s observation that “Nature takes no account of moral consequences” (*Awakening* 110). Dr. Mandelet

implies that a “putative connection of sexuality with love is an illusion of youth, an illusion used by a rather sinister ‘Nature’ to achieve its own ends, with no regard for lives destroyed along the way” (Barton 10). Comparing *The Awakening* to Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, Barton adds that “from the epicenter of Edna’s experience at Adèle’s *accouchement* there stretches backward and forward into other scenes of the novel a vision of animal passion as loveless and deadly,” as opposed to the “celebrat[ion]” of “the ‘animality’ of passion” found in *Song of Myself* (11).

However, as my discussion in chapter two will illustrate, Chopin uses a connotation for “animal passion” in variance with Barton’s. Chopin says she is “inclined to think that love springs from animal instinct, and therefore is, in a measure, divine” (Toth and Seyersted, *Private Papers* 219). Since love to Chopin is divine, her connotation of “animal” more closely resembles “primitive” or “primal” in the sense that the passion of love is essential and natural. In turn, nature reflects the divine order of things; and as with the divine, the natural order takes no account of human conceptions of right and wrong, good and evil. Consequences transpire despite our judgments. My discussions of her works in chapters four through six will consistently illustrate her sense that love is pervading, essential, and validated, an apprehension that never appears in Howells, Maupassant, or Flaubert. Chopin never indicates that passion is “loveless and deadly”; rather, she “celebrates” passion as essential and undeniable.

Although Chopin is recognized as a naturalist by several critics, within this relatively small body of criticism, we find no detailed or accurate discussion of Chopin’s unique understanding of love as natural. Chopin implies that while we have no choice in experiencing love, we do have some choice in our response to its force in us. Often her

characters make a self-defeating first choice, but as often return to a more appropriate choice after they grow in awareness. Examples are Athénaïse, in the story of that name, who returns to her husband after becoming aware of her pregnancy, and Thérèse, in *At Fault*, who errs in insisting on David and Fanny's remarriage, but who concedes her error after Fanny's death and finally consents to marriage. As my discussions of her works will show, Chopin affirms relations that may properly take the form of marriage, asserts that divorce can be justified in certain individual cases, and consistently challenges in her works judgments based solely on societal imperatives.

The size and diversity of the body of Chopin criticism demonstrate the difficulty of classifying her work. With an openness to valid perspectives, I will examine biographical details as they reflect her involvement with other writers. While she most often chooses female protagonists with feminine concerns in her re-vision of male protagonists, she also handles her male characters as having worth and the possibility of growth. Although local color elements are apparent in her work, she tends neither to "resist change," nor to insist on "endurance . . . rather than defiance" as she boldly addresses "violence, youth, romantic love" (Campbell 21). Additionally, her pervading narrative sympathy for diverse cultures is surprising, considering that her family owned slaves and that her husband was active in the White League.

This study will contribute to scholarship of Chopin as a feminist, realist, or local color writer by situating her work in relation to that of other, usually male, writers and by examining her engagement with existing cultural systems and literary traditions as an essential feature of her development. Chopin resists the label "feminist" or "local colorist," arguing that "social problems, social environment, local color and the rest of it

are not *of themselves* motives to insure the survival of a writer who employs them” (*Works* 693); nevertheless, in her relationship with male realists and naturalists, she selectively appropriates or rejects male genres and narrative perspectives as she directly or indirectly questions implicit ideologies and conventions. Appropriating conventions of naturalism, Chopin, in her re-vision of the genre, adds elements of romance.

My purpose here will be to demonstrate how Chopin reconsiders existing literary traditions: first the realist tradition of Howells, in which free human choice is replaced by moral and societal imperatives; then the European short story tradition of Maupassant that rejects cultural imperatives but marginalizes the female consciousness; and finally the European deterministic tradition of Flaubert, in which objective representation of the female protagonist prohibits intersubjective apprehension of her consciousness. By reading Chopin in such a historical context, we can determine how her work critiques existing patriarchal literary discourse. Returning to a more subjective narrator, Chopin transforms patriarchal discourse by removing narrative authority, revealing the female consciousness, and thus validating the marginalized voice.

I will situate this new perspective within the current body of criticism. While several critics and biographers have noted that Chopin sent Howells a copy of *At Fault* after reading *A Modern Instance*, no one has yet done a detailed comparative discussion. Although her reliance on Maupassant as a model is well-documented, few detailed comparisons exist. These few include Seyersted’s, Toth’s, and Sempreora’s previously mentioned discussions, as well as a comparison by Pamela Gaudé of “The Storm” to two of Maupassant’s stories and a valuable examination by Richard Fusco of

the “structural diversity” of Maupassant’s short stories as “a springboard” for Chopin, (139). Although similarities between *The Awakening* and *Madame Bovary* are often mentioned, a limited number of detailed comparisons exist. I will refer to current criticisms in respective chapters concerning these works.

My primary concerns are the intertextuality of Chopin’s work and how it fits into intellectual, social, and historical circumstances as realism was giving way to naturalism, and as naturalism was itself evolving. In chapter one, I will define and historically place the movements of literary realism and naturalism. In chapter two, I will examine biographical details essential to Chopin’s literary development. In chapter three, I will discuss Chopin’s literary dialogue with American realists, concentrating particularly on her departure from the social imperatives in Howells’s *A Modern Instance*. In chapter four, I will explore Chopin’s adaptations of Maupassant’s narration and structure to fit her concern with the feminine consciousness. I will devote chapters five and six to a discussion of Chopin’s dialogic engagement with Flaubert in her final novel, *The Awakening*, in which Chopin’s protagonist, unlike Flaubert’s, awakens to internal forces that motivate her.

In Chopin’s development under the influences of Howells, Maupassant, and Flaubert, she forms a link between French and American realism and naturalism. In her work, she never yields wholly to the implications of literary realism or of deterministic naturalism. Even as she is learning her craft from these male writers, she enters into a dialogue with them. Often adopting their plots and themes, she modifies them, adding elements of romance, particularly in the determination of characters to make choices in light of forces neither they nor we can comprehend. Her adaptations serve a perspective

and concerns distinctly different from those she is responding to. The very stories she chooses thus to “retell” indicate her concerns. The ways she changes plots, characters, circumstances, developments, and resolutions provide glimpses into her motives and formal intentions.

The Historical Context of Literary Realism and Naturalism

Because

Because they must, the birds sing.
 The earth turns new in Spring
 Because it must—'Tis only man
 That does because he can
 And knowing good from ill,
 Chooses because he will—
 (c.1899, *Works* 734)

I will preface my discussion of Chopin's contribution to literary realism and naturalism by defining the sequential and interrelated movements of realism and naturalism, beginning with a definition of realism, a product of a rationalist seventeenth-century concept of the real. According to Ian Watt, modern literary realism, with all its implications and constraints, had its beginnings with Descartes and Locke and in the Enlightenment notion that "truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses" (12). Consequently, "realism" has become "the defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction," a differentiation characterized also by "a break with the old-fashioned romances" (Watt 10)¹.

¹Ian Watt (1957) emphasizes both the formal characteristics of realism and the historical development of the novel. Most critics concur with eighteenth-century or philosophical bases. Northrop Frye (1957) attributes Defoe with beginning the "middle class form" of low mimesis (34). Harry Levin (1963) notes that Locke "discovered" the "new school of ideology . . . out of which realism arises [among the materialistic schools of philosophy]" (102); while Descartes was instrumental in realism's retention of "a quantum of objectivity" (76). George Becker (1963) argues that realism stems from "scientific and positivistic thinking which characterized the middle of the nineteenth century" (6). George Levine (1974) calls realism "an historical phenomenon . . . rather than a literary or metaphysical ideal" (235), adding that though writers of realism thought they were "moving closer to the truth," fiction, in fact, gives "precedence to form over reality" (240). Alice Kaminsky (1974) traces realism's philosophical development from Platonist "conceptual realism;" e. g., the reality of the concept man, through a Lockean "externality of things . . . revealed to the mind" instrumental in Flaubert's realism (215, 216). Critics of American realism often deny European connections. Alfred Kazin (1942) attributes European realism to

Not surprisingly, it was Descartes's method of accepting "nothing on trust," instrumental in the realists' "pursuit of truth," that led to the novel form (Watt 13). Descartes offered his methodological doubt as a means of seeing all things anew instead of through the lenses and prisms of tradition and convention to gain a knowledge grounded in one's own awareness, a mode of seeing and representing adapted in the new literary form of the novel. In its methods and forms, then, "philosophical realism" is "anti-traditional" and "free from the body of past assumptions" (Watt 12). Whereas epics rely on "past history or fable" and insist on a conventional "literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre," one of the novel's primary intentions is to remain true to the unique experience of the individual (Watt 13). The novel is thus "the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel, and it is therefore well named" (13). As such, the realist novel pretends "to be no more than a transcription of real life—in Flaubert's words, '*le réel écrit*'" (Watt 30). The senses can apprehend "real things" and the mind can transform these sensate apprehensions into knowledge by performing its inductive operations on them.

Watt explains that the realist perspective is determined by both the rationalist's "methods of investigation" and the "kinds of problems" they raise, with emphasis on the

concepts of Newton, Comte, Darwin, and Taine, and suggests American realism "poured sullenly out of agrarian bitterness" (217). Lionel Trilling (1950) and Richard Chase (1957) argue that America lacks ideological conflicts of the Old World. These critics equate the romance with the exceptional absence of class-bound culture in America, with the result that American realism is an imperfect imitation of European realism. Everett Carter (1950) and Edwin Cady (1957) relate American realism to Howells's conception of American democratic values, viewing it as a Social Darwinist revolt against sentimentality. Amy Kaplan (1988) views American realism as a social reformist strategy for "imagining and managing the threats of social change . . . often to assuage fears of powerlessness" (10). Donald Pizer (1995) replaces American historic event for French ideology in American realism.

semantic problem “of the nature of the correspondence between words and reality” (14). Manifesting the rationalist notion of the Enlightenment, realists turned to John Locke’s conception of language, a notion that proscribes the symbolic language of the romance. According to Locke, rhetoric and metaphor have no superfluous or extraneous reality or truth to express, and so they can only distract an author from expressing truth, the ultimate, sole function of language.² Instead, Locke explained, language has only three main ends:

first to make known one man’s thoughts or ideas to another; secondly, to do it with as much ease as possible; and thirdly, thereby to convey the knowledge of all things. (Bk 3, 10:23)

According to this notion, language can express the whole of unexpressed reality or truth by expressing clear ideas grounded in sense experience. To express the “real” of the commonplace, the realist novel relies on precise language, and thus raises the issue of

the correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates. This is essentially an epistemological problem, and it therefore seems likely that the nature of the novel’s realism, whether in the early eighteenth century or later, can best be clarified by help of those professionally concerned with the analysis of concepts, the philosophers. (Watt 11)

Adhering to rationalist notions of the “real” and a strict Lockean view of the precise use of language, Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary* (serially 1856, volume 1857), was obsessed with finding the *mot juste*, the perfect word, that will convey as directly as possible the corresponding reality. Locke’s conception of language minus imagery, his

² Locke explains, “We must allow that all art of rhetorick, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are a perfect cheat.” (Bk 3, ch 10, sect 34)

idea that rhetoric and metaphor are superfluous and should be avoided, was of primary importance, as Flaubert's fiction uncompromisingly "restricts itself almost entirely to a descriptive and denotative use of language" (Watt 29). Flaubert must avoid romance conventions since they open the reader to fantasy rather than to reality. He is determined, in *Madame Bovary*, to use precise language objectively presenting tangible reality to the apprehension.

Although Flaubert resisted being called a realist, he was nevertheless influential in the French school of realists, or "*Réalisme*," a term borrowed from its earlier connotations of the "*vérité humaine*" of Rembrandt as it opposed the "*idéauté poétique* of neo-classical painting" (Watt 10). In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert removes every trace of the "*idéauté poétique*," and presents his characters with the detached objectivity of a scientist, implying that tangible reality is expressible even if difficult to express.

Implications of *Réalisme* as a way of objectively "knowing" reality filtered into the American sensibility after the Civil War, when writers such as William Dean Howells began to write against the implications of the romance. Howells, a widely visible critic and novelist, offered his simplified definition of realism as "nothing more than the truthful treatment of material" (*Criticism* 229). H. H. Boyesen, a contemporary of Howells, argued that progressive American realism should "chronicle the widely divergent phases of our American civilization" (Boyesen 73), a premise that would provide a rationale for the local color realist. Unlike the French realists, however, both Howells and Boyesen also called for a depiction of normative behavior, omitting the barbaric, immoral, or atavistic. A youthful Hamlin Garland agreed, writing in *Crumbling Idols* (1894) that realism "will not deal with crime and abnormalities, nor

with diseased persons, . . . [but rather] with the wholesome love of honest men for honest women, with the heroism of labor, . . . a drama of average types of characters, infinitely varied, but always characteristic” (28). These early American realists would appear then to maintain a hidden criterion for experience that is “representative”—not of “all” experience but of all “normal” and “proper” experience. These stipulations seem *a priori* criteria for selecting material in American realism.

Since American realism was to represent the “normal” and “proper,” it also remained essentially optimistic. Realism in France, on the other hand, existed simultaneously with a pessimistic determinism such as that found in *Madame Bovary*. One characteristic of such determinism is the idea that, having no free will, we are merely the product of the forces operating on and in us, a vision that eliminates choice, including that based on the normal and proper. Realism this pure is indistinguishable from deterministic naturalism. As George Levine, in “Realism Reconsidered,” explains,

English realism . . . tended . . . to assume that the real is both meaningful and good, while French realism has consistently tended away from such moral assumptions to lead more directly to the notion of an indifferent universe and to that even more specialized kind of realism, naturalism.
(236)

Emma Bovary’s universe is epitomized by such naturalistic indifference. Each of Emma’s choices and actions is determined by a specific cause or complex of causes over which she has no control. These causes produce specific effects that in turn become the cause of later effects. Flaubert implies that if he can know every influence and name every cause operating on Emma, then he can tell us every effect. Flaubert’s cause-and-effect perspective leaves no place for Emma, or for anyone else in the story,

to exercise free will. Adhering to a perspective and assumptions later articulated by Zola and Taine, Flaubert remains “detached,” studying the implications of causality with the dispassion of a scientist. Emma Bovary can never change; though she has the capacity to know her plight, she can never escape it. Instead of seeing the world as it is, she tries to make it conform to the “romantic” vision she finds in her books, an effort to assert her “will” that can only fail. Such deterministic naturalism as that in *Madame Bovary* is inherently pessimistic.

Unlike the simultaneous literary movements of realism and naturalism in France so clearly illustrated in *Madame Bovary*, naturalism in America occurred as a movement separate from realism. Naturalism did not appear consistently in American fiction until the 1890s in such works as Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (serially 1893, volume 1896), *The Red Badge of Courage* (serially 1894, volume 1895), and “The Open Boat” (1897), and Norris’s *McTeague* (begun in 1892, published in 1899). Yet despite these writers’ familiarity with the pessimistic naturalism of France, Everett Carter argues that optimism persisted in American naturalism, noting that “American writers at the turn of the century did not succumb to complete pessimism. ‘Naturalism’ in the sense of a completely pessimistic determinism never existed save in the minds of its enemies” (Carter, *Howells* 234, “Realism” 401). Instead, writing against a pessimistic vision that precludes the possibility for change, American writers considered a truthful portrayal of reality a stimulus to a return to the “normal” and “proper.”

The degree of optimism or pessimism, then, is a defining characteristic of determinism, based, in part, on how the novelist views his reader’s capacity to improve

his condition. For example, whereas Flaubert perceived all “humanity” as “essentially the same, linked by an eternal inescapable baseness . . . odious and incurable” (Spencer 110), Howells believed that “through facing . . . realities [people] could . . . cure some of the diseases that were corrupting the American life he loved” (Carter, *Howells* 62).

Expanding the idea of degrees of determinism, Richard Lehan notes that “formalist critics see important distinctions between (say) the novels of Zola and Dreiser. . . . These differences take place along a shared spectrum of meaning that leads to a different emphasis between texts but not to a difference in narrative ontology” (Lehan 50). Variations in the degree of determinism along this shared spectrum of meaning eventually resulted in a general movement to a less deterministic naturalism. As readers and writers tired of deterministic resolutions, a newer “softer” naturalism, an essentially more optimistic naturalism adhering more to the techniques and visions of the romance, was to replace “hard determinism” in both America and Europe, a development, according to John Conder, “from determinism to self-determination” (195).

I borrow, in essence, Conder’s definition of the terms “hard” and “soft.” Conder illustrates “hard determinism” (70) with a line from Norris’s *McTeague*: “Chance had brought them face to face, and mysterious instincts as ungovernable as the winds of heaven were at work knitting their lives together” (Norris, *Novels and Essays* 326). In characters thus determined by forces beyond their control, Conder asks, “Is anyone to blame? . . . No. No one is to blame” (Conder 70). On the other hand, according to Conder, as determinism softens in the twentieth-century, it “permits the development of freedom within the natural world as an attribute of nature” (163).

Within the tradition [the twentieth-century writer] brought self-fulfillment to individuals by moving a group from determinism to self-determination. By so doing, he moved the naturalistic tradition from the grim hopelessness of "The Blue Hotel" or *McTeague* to hope triumphant. (195)

I hesitate, however, to join the words "soft determinism" (160) as Conder does, and I depart from him, also, in his understanding that in "soft determinism" before the twentieth-century, rather than actual freedom, "man [only] retains the appearance of freedom" (160). In my use of the terms, in portrayals by hard naturalists, characters are determined by forces beyond their control and are thus exonerated from blame. On the other hand, "soft" naturalism, already evident in the nineteenth-century in Chopin's fiction, re-opens the romantic possibility of something mysterious operating in and through us and allows again the possibility of free human choice. Since characters in "soft" naturalism are able to make choices and act on them, they may begin to move toward self-fulfillment. At the same time, however, even as Edna Pontellier grows in awareness and self-determination and does have limited choice "as an attribute of nature," finally she demands complete freedom from the conditions of existence.

Conveying the idea that some mystery remains in our motivations, romance elements—"those tendencies . . . best represented by Hawthorne . . . [and] (Melville)" (Carter, *Howells* 238)—returned to the novel. Alice Kaminsky, in her essay "On Literary Realism," notes that writers began to reject the earlier "emphasis upon the façade of experience and concentrated instead upon revealing in their own special ways the truth of intersubjective experience" (219). American writers, maintaining a generally optimistic vision of their readers' capacity to change, seem first to define and demonstrate this more subjective naturalism. Frank Norris notes in his essay, "Zola as a

Romantic Writer,” that “Naturalism is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism” (Norris, *Novels and Essays* 1108). He elaborates in “A Plea for Romantic Fiction” that this more “romantic” naturalism, that I am calling “soft” naturalism, explores “the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man” (Norris 1168-69). Henry James, too, suggests, in his “Preface” to *The American*, that romantic fiction expresses or addresses a dimension of “reality” that the strict realist or deterministic naturalist would not assent to:

The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another. . . . The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we can never directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thoughts and our desires. (*Art* 31-32)

Everett Carter notes that Howells too had

observed, and to some extent charted, the flow of these new currents towards twentieth-century fiction, one in the direction of the psychological, the other in the direction of the mythical, both of which directions ultimately converged in writers like Faulkner and Steinbeck. . . . By 1903, Howells saw that “a whole order of literature” had arisen to which the name “psychological” might be given, as the term “scientific” had been applied to realism. (*Howells* 238).

Carter explains that this more “mythical” and “psychological” naturalism was to extend the boundaries of the commonplace and the objective both “downward, deeper into the inner life of the individual, [and] . . . upward, into the life of the race” (*Howells* 237). The conventions used to represent a character’s experience suggest now that characters, rather than being constrained to stimulus response, can change and grow. Unlike Bartley Hubbard, for example, who can only respond to stimuli, Silas Lapham does experience growth, albeit in inverse proportion to his financial ruin. Unlike Emma

Bovary, who can never become aware of her plight, Edna Pontellier “awakens” not only to a realization of her own limited possibilities, but also to the forces of love in her life. As my study will demonstrate, this new, “softer” naturalism, with its return to the more psychological and intersubjective conventions it shares with the romance, is the movement to which Chopin most contributes.

I will now trace briefly the movements first of literary realism, then of “hard” and “soft” naturalism to suggest their complex interrelatedness as they developed in France and in America. Donald Pizer places the simultaneous movements of realism and naturalism in France from the late 1850s to the late 1880s (“Problem” 4). In fact, *Madame Bovary*, first published serially in 1856, is the moment in French literary history that the realist perspective achieved its purest form.

As fiction was tending away from the “idealist metaphysics” (Becker 6) of romance, Flaubert, at first proud of his “passionate rhetoric” in *La Tentation de saint Antoine* (1849), was advised by his friends Bouilhet and Du Camp never again to write such an “heroic recreation” (Spencer 93) as he had struggled with for over three years in that novel. As a consequence, his next work was *Madame Bovary*, a reaction against the sentimentality of such romantic fiction. Rather than relying on “passionate rhetoric” in *Madame Bovary*, he relied wholly on externalities to convey thoughts and feelings. Consequently, George Becker explains, “the heaping up of physical data became important” (30). To accomplish an external perspective, not rhetoric but “facts . . . should speak for themselves as they do in life. There should be . . . no authorial elbow nudging the reader in the ribs” (Becker 28). *Madame Bovary*, with its objective “heaping up” of details, was, according to Becker, the “touchstone by which to assess

the new literature” of France in the 1850s (30). Critics generally agree that *Madame Bovary* was “the earliest masterpiece of modern realism” (Van Doren 11).

Yet, as a masterpiece of realism, *Madame Bovary* was also an example of “hard” deterministic naturalism. While the realist Flaubert objectively and dispassionately amasses minute details of Emma’s ennui, the naturalist Flaubert denies her any means of escape from that ennui. She can neither escape nor achieve her romantic vision, so determined is she by forces beyond her control. Perhaps never before or after *Madame Bovary* were a combined realism and naturalism so pure.

In contrast to this simultaneous unfolding of French realism and naturalism, Pizer places the separate and successive American movements later, with realism beginning after 1865 and naturalism beginning around 1900 (“Problem” 5). I would argue, however, that American naturalism was well underway in the 1890s in naturalist works by Crane and Norris, with determinism appearing even as early as 1882 in Howells’s *A Modern Instance*.

Pizer, nonetheless, accurately places American realism after 1865, a date most critics accept as a defining moment in American literary history. Before the Civil War, writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe were writing against the assumptions of realism and often seeing realism as their target. Instead of having a concern for the commonplace or common experience, Carter notes that these romantic writers had a concern for “the truths which lay behind the world of appearances, all turning to the symbol as a means of fusing this truth with the physical, all immersed in a tragic vision of life” (*Howells* 24). Instead of observing and objectively recording middle-class life,

such writers found “the material for their creation in probing behind the façade of Middle Class American life and society of their times” (*Howells* 25).

Although Howells, who met Hawthorne in 1860, could admire such romantic fiction as *The Blithedale Romance*, he was better able to relate to philosophical idealists such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. Emerson saw the physical world as a symbol for the spiritual world, and thus as a part of “universal goodness” (Carter, *Howells* 26). Proclaiming “the greatness of the commonplace,” Emerson believed that the great American writer would “worship humble American things” (*Howells* 26).

Indeed, works praising “humble American things” and conforming to the conventions of realism did appear in post-bellum American writing. At that time, America was characterized by a frontier optimism followed by the idea that the triumphant North could “fix” the South. Unlike the earlier pessimistic realism of Flaubert, this realism in a relatively young America was to remain optimistic. Implications of such an optimistic vision were that, if we can know the real, then we can improve it.

At the same time, America’s frontier notions of egalitarianism and the worth of “the commonplace” and the common man led to increasing concern with the emerging middle class. In contrast, concern for an emerging bourgeoisie in France had remained more condescending than elevating. Flaubert, himself bourgeois, was a “great hater and vilifier of the bourgeois. . . . His period was one in which the middle classes had obtained power . . . in industry, politics, finance, and society; . . . What Flaubert stigmatized as bourgeois was essentially power itself, the pompous folly of authority” (Spencer 48). Similarly, Maupassant, Flaubert’s pupil, had “a voluble scorn for the

petite bourgeoisie—scorn derived in part . . . from Flaubert’s incessant anti-bourgeois railings” (Steegmuller 67). This French distaste for its growing bourgeois class resulted in the greater irony of pessimistic determinism. As Becker explains, “the first step [to understanding and truth] was to shatter the image which the bourgeois reflected to himself, and Flaubert gave us Homais” (26). Nevertheless, albeit with decidedly different implications, in both France and America the novel as a literary form derives from the interests and concerns of the “middle class” and reflects their assumptions and presumptions. Although developments of the genre in France and America have marked distinctions, both are characterized by a break from romantic fiction and represent an essentially middle-class perspective.

In post-bellum America, Howells, like Flaubert a decade earlier in France, was concerned with accurately observing and portraying a middle-class “reality.” However, to Flaubert, the “reality” of the bourgeois included “vices of self-satisfaction, vulgarity, and insensitiveness” (Spencer 48), whereas Howells defends the American middle class and the commonplace, noting that Americans

have been now some hundred years building up a state on the affirmation of the essential equality of men in their rights and duties. . . . Such beauty and such grandeur as we have is common beauty, common grandeur. . . . These conditions invite the artist to the study and the appreciation of the common, and to the portrayal in every art of those finer and higher aspects which unite rather than sever humanity.
(257-58)

Like Flaubert, however, Howells variously portrays realists as physicians, priests, scientists, or teachers. Flaubert, who believed “you only have to look at a thing long enough and it becomes interesting” (Spencer 136), admired “the accumulation of facts that was the essence of the scientific method” (Spencer 139). He “felt that the

artist could . . . learn from the scientist—could become like him, impartial and clear-minded, content to observe and correlate without hurrying to form a conclusion” (136). Similarly, Howells explains that the realist “cannot look upon life and declare this thing or that thing unworthy of notice, any more than the scientist can declare a fact of the material world beneath the dignity of his inquiry” (*Criticism* 201), adding further that “the art . . . which disdains the office of teacher . . . is now seeking to shelter itself in aestheticism” (282).

Accepting “the office of teacher,” Howells believed that the average person has the power to know what is real. Unlike Flaubert, who believed that the bourgeoisie was “implacably opposed to art” (Spencer 48), Howells believed that

[art] perceives that to take itself from the many and leave them no joy in their work, and to give itself to the few whom it can bring no joy in their idleness, is an error that kills. The men and women who do the hard work of the world have learned that they have a right to pleasure in their toil, and that when justice is done them, they will have it. . . . When the great mass of readers . . . shall be lifted to an interest in the meaning of things through the faithful portrayal of life in fiction, then fiction the most faithful may be superseded by a still more faithful form of contemporary history. (*Criticism* 280-81, 282)

Implications of Howells’s more optimistic vision are, first, that if we can know the “real,” then we can control it and, second, that “fiction” and “reality” will eventually become synonymous, fiction having the authority of reality and reality having the order and “knowingness” of fiction. Howells insists that such an apprehension be accessible to America’s middle class.

Even as Howells was arguing for an American art, however, he was not precluding the importance of French influence. America was by no means isolated from world literature. Networks of relationships occurred in America as well as in

France and between the two cultures through authors reading authors and responding to authors. American writers were curious about French literature, as were the French about American literature. Harold Mantz explains that in France, Chasles and Tocqueville, “followed very frequently by others upon the same subject,” had been publishing criticism of American literature as early as 1835, with Chasles’s last work appearing posthumously in 1875 (Mantz 118). Later critics predicted “that a new and vigorous literature would come out of [America]” (Mantz 155).

A growing and optimistic interest in American literature was becoming apparent in France. In fact, when Henry James and Turgenev were both attending Flaubert’s “Sundays,” James wrote Howells that Turgenev owned and liked some of Howells’s works (Cady, *Road* 196). Since “Turgenev brought foreign books and translated aloud poems by Göethe, Pushkin, or Swinburne” (Steegmuller 63), perhaps one or another of Howells’s works was occasionally mentioned or discussed at the “Sundays.”

American interest in French literature was also in the ascendancy in the latter part of the century. Between 1881 and 1889, during part of which Chopin lived in Louisiana (1870-1884), Lafcadio Hearn was translating and publishing excerpts of Flaubert, Maupassant, Baudelaire and others in *The New Orleans Democrat* (Seyersted, *Chopin* 42, Steegmuller 277). Jonathon Sturges also published translations of thirteen of Maupassant’s stories in his widely read book, *The Odd Number* (1889). Similarly, Howells says in *My Literary Passions* (serially through 1894, volume 1895):

I do not mind owning that [Zola] has been one of my greatest literary passions, almost as great as Flaubert, and greater than Daudet and Maupassant, though I have profoundly appreciated the exquisite artistry of both these. (181)

Since such an interrelatedness existed between American and European realism, and since French realism developed simultaneously with French naturalism and was becoming increasingly deterministic in works by the younger Zola, such as in his twenty-volume *Rougon-Macquart* series (1871-1893), it is not surprising that writers in America also began tending toward the more deterministic novel. Although the “Age” of realism, characterized by Howells’s “deep conviction of the values of the world of appearances,” did not disappear at once, Carter explains that, finally, it “trailed off like a sigh after the explosion of the Haymarket” (Carter, *Howells* 225). Howells’s expressions of a general goodness in the American people he loved were becoming “overwhelmed by increasing weariness and pessimism” (*Howells* 225). Younger writers in America, such as Crane, Norris, and Dreiser, were “catching and recording the first tremors of cultural change” (232), as their fiction began to include deterministic elements always apparent in French realism. At the same time, however, these writers remained indebted to Howells. Carter explains that the young American naturalists “all are in a direct line of descent from Howellsian realism” (231). Perhaps in part because of Howells’s influence, American naturalists, Carter argues, were to avoid the pessimism of the French deterministic naturalists (235).

Yet despite Carter’s argument that American naturalists were less pessimistic than their counterparts in France, determinism was pronounced in America as well as in France. Both Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* and “The Open Boat,” for example, are essentially pessimistic. However, though pessimistic determinism clearly existed in American naturalist works, many naturalists considered such pessimism a stimulus to improvement in the human condition, still influenced by Howells’s notion that, by

“facing . . . realities,” we could “cure some of the diseases” of humankind (Carter, *Howells* 62).

Nonetheless, such pessimistic determinism as that found in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* series, as well as Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, and *A Modern Instance*, Howells’s most deterministic novel, did not hold. Charles Walcutt explains that the focus of naturalist writers began to shift “from the environment to the mind of the central character. . . . The cause for the shift seems to lie in the fact that the naturalistic technique uses materials which are not as compelling or interesting as the inner life of the character” (Walcutt 54). New writers on the horizon, aware that an inner dimension of characters was not expressible in deterministic naturalism, gradually began writing a more psychological, romantic naturalism.

This gradual softening to a more psychological apprehension of characters is apparent in the new younger writers, such as Maupassant and Chopin. Maupassant, who learned directly from the French masters at Flaubert’s *Sundays*, rejected objective realism and determinism as he delved more deeply into the psyche than those genres permitted. Similarly, Chopin learned indirectly from masters in both France and America through her extensive reading of their criticism and fiction. She asserted her departure from them in her own essays and fiction, opting for a more subjective, internal apprehension of characters than those genres permitted. These two writers were at the forefront of the more psychological naturalism.

While Maupassant’s work as a whole is difficult to classify as one type, many of his stories exhibit characteristics of a softer naturalism. Steegmuller notes that stories Maupassant wrote after Flaubert’s death were characterized by a “new, lighter style

blending beautifully with his own temperament” (159). Tracing the onset of this lighter style, Steegmuller notes that a month before Flaubert’s death in May, 1880, he had implored Maupassant, whom he variously referred to as his “pupil,” his “disciple,” and his “adopted son” (Steegmuller 58, 60, 81), to “try to write a dozen like [‘Boule de Suif’] and you’ll be a man” (116). Maupassant’s next collection, *La Maison Tellier* (May, 1881), followed “successfully the course charted for him by Flaubert” and included stories “of the same general character, the same weight and pace, . . . full of the grave and measured influence of Flaubert” (157).

After that collection, however, Maupassant’s stories were to depart from stories of such “weight and pace.” Steegmuller attributes the change partially to Maupassant’s brief career in journalism, a profession Flaubert “despised” (160). Beginning that career less than a month after Flaubert’s death, Maupassant wrote articles for both the *Gaulois* and the *Gil-Blas*. Those articles became increasingly anecdotal until they “gradually developed, more and more skillfully written, into many of the stories that we know” (145). Steegmuller suggests that, in particular, “the raffishness of the *Gil-Blas* had led him to discover one side of his genius: his supremacy in the light, risqué story” (158). Probably as an outcome too of that experience in journalism was another of “the non-Flaubertian traits which he developed, . . . the rapidity and ease with which he learned . . . to write” (160). These lighter stories, Steegmuller argues, “the direct outcome of the journalism so despised by Flaubert, make it seem likely that not only Flaubert’s life, but also his death, contributed to Maupassant’s maturing into artistic ‘manhood’” (160). As I hope to demonstrate later, that “artistic ‘manhood’” was characterized by a softer, more psychological, less deterministic naturalism.

After discovering Maupassant in 1888, and experimenting herself with the “light,” even the “risqué,” short story in the 1890s, Kate Chopin’s own softer naturalism approached maturity. Yet while Chopin responded to Maupassant, her different formal intentions, most often focusing on the feminine consciousness and characterized by romance elements retained from her youthful experience with the romance, resulted in a softer and more psychological naturalism than we have yet seen, even in Maupassant.

Besides Chopin’s emphasis on feminine concerns, her almost unique historical placement vis-à-vis these literary movements in America and France was to contribute to her artistic development. As a young American female writer living in close proximity and intimacy with French culture first in St. Louis, then in Louisiana, and finally in her return as a widow to St. Louis during the period characterized by “the tremors of cultural change” (Carter, *Howells* 232), Chopin artistically blends those cultures. Unlike some of the authors Chopin responds to, she suggests the mysterious nature of motivations, the possibility of growth, and the inherent goodness in human nature. More than ever before noted, her return to such romance elements contributes to a movement toward the implications of a “soft” naturalism.

Biographical Influences on Chopin's Literary Career

To the Friend of My Youth: To Kitty

It is not all of life
 To cling together while the years glide past.
 It is not all of love
 To walk with clasped hands from first to last.
 That mystic garland which the spring did twine
 Of scented lilac and the new-blown rose,
 Faster than chains will hold my soul and thine
 Thro' joy, and grief, thro' life—unto its close.
 (1899, *Works* 735)

Although Chopin rejected the pessimism of Flaubert and Zola, as her work matured she depended more on French than on American models, abandoning Howells for Maupassant, for example, as her “point of departure” (Seyersted *Chopin* 138). William Schuyler reported in *The Writer* (1894) that she came to prefer the French writers “and particularly Maupassant,” since American writers still had “limitations imposed upon their art by their environment [that] hamper a full and spontaneous expression” (Schuyler 117, Seyersted, *Chopin* 89, Toth, *Unveiling* 162). Chopin, a personal friend of the Schuylers, commented in her diary, “He has [written a personal sketch of me] admirably. I don’t know who could have done it better, could have better told in so short a space the story of my growth into artistic maturity” (May 28, 1894, Toth and Seyersted, *Private Papers* 183). Her tacit agreement indicates the influence on her development of the more “spontaneous expression” of the French writers.

At the same time, Chopin was an American, raised in a slave-holding family in the rapidly growing trade center and melting pot of St. Louis, with Indians on horseback

and slave auctions on the courthouse steps (Rankin 38, Seyersted 20). Later, as a young wife in New Orleans, “she loved to ride on streetcars and observe people” of a variety of nationalities and races: “Creoles and Cajuns, Negroes and mulattoes, Germans, Italians, Irish, and Americans” (Seyersted 41). Moving to Cloutierville, Louisiana in 1879, she lived among simple African-Americans, Cajuns, and Creoles, including Oscar’s “droves of aunts and uncles” (Toth, *Unveiling* 66), most of whom viewed with disdain this “city-bred woman with a taste for fashionable clothes and urban amusements” (*Unveiling* 81). Both by observing life first hand in these varied locales and by reading American realist works, Chopin developed an intimate and sympathetic knowledge of some of “the widely divergent phases of our American civilization” (Boyesen 73).

Chopin’s blending of French and American cultures stems from her heritage as well as from her geographical and historical placement. Since her heritage and placement were both essential to her unique literary development, I will examine relevant biographical details. I will discuss, in particular, evidence of works she read in English, French, and German, noting how elements of the romance novel and the religious training of her youth remained with her even as she studied naturalist philosophy and became a more naturalistic writer. I will examine, too, her familiarity with the French and German languages that allowed her to read works in their language of composition and finally to translate works as she became increasingly familiar with nuances of themes and structures.

Born in St. Louis in 1851, to a French mother and an Irish father with “an easy command of French,” young Katherine O’Flaherty was first acquainted with French, the

language spoken at home (Seyersted, *Chopin* 15-16). Along with fluency in French, “a sound knowledge of the French classics was taken for granted in [her great-grandmother Charleville’s] circle” (Seyersted, *Chopin* 18). As a young child, Kate, a voracious reader, was to read German, French, Norwegian, and British authors. Her intimate friend and schoolmate, Kitty Garesché (Sister Katherine Garesché), reported to Daniel Rankin:

Some of the books we read together before the summer of 1863 were *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, *Blind Agnese*, *Paul and Virginia*, *Dickens for Little Folks* a series; *Little Nell*, *Little Dorrit*, etc., . . . *Days of Bruce*, *Pilgrims Progress*, . . . the metrical romances of Scott with his *Talisman* and *Ivanhoe*, with some of the chosen poems of Pope, Collins, and Gray.
(Letter Sept. 7, 1930, in Rankin 37)

Perhaps the young Kate O’Flaherty’s favorite childhood novel was *The Days of Bruce* (1852), by Grace Aguilar. Chopin reported that she and her friend Kitty often read and “wept in company over ‘The Days of Bruce’ and later, exchanged our heart secrets” (Toth and Seyersted, *Private Papers* 299, *Miscellany* 104). Emily Toth notes that Chopin, years later, “drew on memories of Aguilar’s and [Sir Walter] Scott’s fair heroines for Adèle Ratignolle in *The Awakening*: ‘There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams’” (*Private Papers* 297, *Awakening* 10).

The Days of Bruce, Aguilar’s lengthy swashbuckler complete with jousts and courtly lovers, might indeed have had bearing on Chopin’s later work. Even as she became a more naturalistic writer, she was unwilling to let go of something of her experience with the romance. Although she eventually outgrew the artifice of the sentimental romance, its ability to evoke an inexpressible yearning for an ineffable something was formative and remained with her.

To explore different perspectives on these yearnings, Chopin might have borrowed the distinctions among three types of women from the three major characters in *The Days of Bruce*. Per Seyersted notes that Chopin's "earliest extant stories are each devoted to one of what we might call the three main types of women: the 'feminine,' the 'emancipated,' and the 'modern' (to use the terminology of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*), and . . . the tension between the two leading components of this triad was to reverberate through her *oeuvre*" (Chopin 103). Although Chopin would have rejected Beauvoir's negative connotation of the "feminine" woman as one who in "making herself prey tries to reduce man, also, to her carnal passivity" (Beauvoir 718), Seyersted's study usefully identifies three distinct female characters, consciously portrayed in Chopin. These three types of women are portrayed forty years earlier in Aguilar.

In *The Days of Bruce*, the three types of women offer different perspectives on love. Agnes, the "feminine" woman, is the picture of "sweet innocence" (*Days* 3), with "a heart young, loving, and confiding" (50). After her husband dies in battle, she welcomes her own death: "'Nigel, my husband, they have loosed my chains, oh, I may come to thee—joy, joy—I come—I come!'" (560).

Agnes's mother, Isabella, is the "emancipated" woman. Isabella possesses

the calm dignity, the graceful majesty . . . [that] seemed to mark her as one born to command, to hold in willing homage the minds and inclinations of men. . . . She looked in features as in form a queen; fitted to be loved, formed to be obeyed. (8)

After her arranged marriage, she asserts her will against her traitor husband, John Comyn, and suffers banishment to a convent. She is not a "modern" woman, however, and she never divulges her love for Robert, King of Scone.

Isoline, King Robert's niece, is the "modern" woman who avoids her uncle's attempts to arrange her marriage to Sir Douglas, since the man she loves is Alan. She asserts her will to shape her own destiny, actively pursuing, marrying, and cooperating with Alan: "not a toil, a danger, a triumph was recalled in which Lady Isoline had not borne a conspicuous part" (*Days* 573).

Seyersted notes these three types of women, the feminine, the emancipated, and the modern respectively, in Chopin's first three stories, "Euphrasie" (1888, published as "A No Account Creole," 1891), "Wiser Than a God" (1889), and "A Point at Issue" (1889). These distinct types appear also in the three main women characters in her first novel, *At Fault* (1890). In that novel, Chopin explores women's capacity to change, as Fanny errs fatally by returning to expectations of the feminine woman, Melicent becomes more emancipated, eventually traveling and "studying certain fundamental truths" with Mrs. Griesmann (*Works* 875), and Thérèse adapts to more modern notions concerning marriage than those of the idealistic Catholicism of her youth.

Early in her career, then, Chopin took her inspiration from other literary works, even in her reconsiderations of the sentimental romance. Whereas many nineteenth-century American realist writers wrote parodies of romance, such as Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Chopin honors as significant the yearnings, desires, and restlessness the romance evokes in her.

Chopin's early inspiration could have had bearing on her choice later to reconsider Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Emma Bovary, too, read romance novels, but unlike Chopin never matured beyond the belief that her life could correspond to her

reading. On the other hand, Edna Pontellier like Chopin experiences growth. Before, and possibly contributing to, her awakening, she read what might well have been a French novel such as *Madame Bovary* in “secret and solitude . . . —to hide it from view at the sound of approaching footsteps” (*Awakening* 11). After her awakening, she “read Emerson until she grew sleepy. She determined to start anew upon a course of improving studies” (*Awakening* 73). Barbara Ewell comments, “Chopin allows only a weak character like Fanny Larimore in her first book ever to be seen ‘reading the latest novel of those prolific female writers who turn out their unwholesome intellectual sweets so tirelessly’” (Ewell, *Chopin* 22, *Works* 798).

In *The Awakening*, her most complex work, Chopin explores possibilities from the distinct perspectives of her three main women characters. Adèle Ratignolle is contented to be the “feminine” mother-woman, Mademoiselle Reisz is the “emancipated” artist, and Edna Pontellier, who is incapable of adapting to either role, strives rather to be a “modern” woman. Unfortunately, Edna is able to find nothing in her life that corresponds to or adequately expresses her yearning; her profound dilemma runs counter to the modern presumption, from which she suffers, that we can find in the world the object of our deepest yearning.

Seyersted comments that Chopin’s work is “no feminist plea in the usual sense, but an illustration—rather than an assertion—of woman’s right to be herself, to be individual and independent” (*Chopin* 196). Chopin has learned, from the sentimental romance of her youth, methods to distinguish between and validate different possibilities for women.

Besides learning from her reading, young Kate O'Flaherty also learned of different possibilities for women from first-hand experience. Tragically losing both her father and her adored half-brother, she grew up in a strong matriarchal family. Her great grandmother, Victoire Verdon Charleville (1780-1865), had a lasting influence on Kate. One of the strong women of six generations of Verdon women in America, Madame Charleville contributed to Kate's strength and independence, her inclination to be nonjudgmental, and her fluency in French. Rankin says that Madame Charleville

insisted always on the child speaking French to her . . . She told the child accounts of the early days of St. Louis. . . . It was the great-grandmother's influence that awoke a penetrating interest in character, particularly in independent, determined women. She admired courageous souls that dared and defied. (Rankin 15)

One story Madame related to Kate was about her mother, Kate's great great grandmother Verdon, who got the first legal separation from her husband granted in St. Louis, gave birth a year later to the child of another, signed her name "La Verdon," and finally began a successful line of trading keelboats between St. Louis and New Orleans (Toth, *Unveiling* 14). Madame Charleville reinforced the notion "that one may know a great deal about people without judging them. God did that" (Rankin 36). Her insight reflects characteristics of the French Catholicism apparent in much of Chopin's writing.

Such childhood influences resulted in budding wings of the variety Mademoiselle Reisz in *The Awakening* warned Edna she would need to develop: "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings" (*Awakening* 82). Conceivably, Chopin could have been describing an incident with her great grandmother Charleville when she wrote that Mademoiselle Reisz "felt

[Edna's] shoulder blades to see if [her] wings were strong" (82). Yet whereas Edna was a "motherless heroine," as Virginia Ross observes,

there is little superficial correspondence between Edna Pontellier's background and experience . . . and Chopin's own life story. . . . As a child she was not without a mother, and she was raised a Catholic in Saint Louis, not a Presbyterian in Kentucky. Her father died when she was quite young, and Chopin was quite close to her mother. (61)

It was women and mothers who most contributed to and encouraged the strengths beginning to surface in Kate's earliest works, both encouraging her reading and writing and providing inspiration and guidance as she grew beyond the sentimental idealism of early youth. For her tenth Christmas, her Great Aunt Charleville Boyer gave her an unlined notebook, a copybook extant at the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis. At first Kate either composed or copied romantic poems from various writers. For example, in the "Dedication," we see youthful idealism in the lines, "Let the thought herein inscribed be as untainted as the snowflake; each wish so pure and bright as the sunbeams of Heaven" (Toth and Seyersted, *Private Papers* 4). This dedication is followed by an equally flowery poem, underneath which Kate herself later responds, "very pretty but where's the point" (*Private Papers* 5). After another equally sentimental poem, which ends with the lines "But oh! It is the worst of pain,/ To love, & not be loved again!" Kate later writes, "foolishness" (*Private Papers* 8). Though not dated, these added lines—evidence of a changing attitude in her response to the romance—were "written in pencil" and "seem to be later additions from a more cynical Kate" (*Private Papers* 4).

Another influence on Kate's early writing and her departure from sentimentalism was her English instructor at Sacred Heart Academy, Mother Mary

O'Meara. Mother O'Meara, "most gifted for composition in both verse and prose" (Sister Garesché qtd in Rankin 46), encouraged the precocious student to continue her writing in a "Common Place Book" that Kate kept from 1867 until after her wedding voyage in 1870 (Rankin 46, Seyersted, *Chopin* 22). Kate copied lines from English authors such as Macauley and Bulwer, including lines by Bulwer on page one that predict a departure from the romance of her youth. She titles her transcription "Extracts from Bulwer's 'My Novel'" and copies these lines:

The indulgence of poetic taste and reverie does great and lasting injury; . . . it serves to . . . give false ideas of life. . . .The poetry which youth usually loves and appreciates the best—the poetry of mere sentiment—does so in minds already over-predisposed to the sentimental. (*Private Papers* 13)

On page two, Kate copied lines from the same source that emphasize the importance of writers to our history:

When we look back upon human records, how the eye settles on Writers as the main land mark of the past! We talk of the age of Augustus, Elizabeth, Louis XIV, of Anne, as the notable eras of the world. Why? Because it is their writers who have made them so. (*Private Papers* 14)

After copying extracts from an English translation of *The Life of Madame Swetchine*, by Count de Falloux, Kate indicated an early proficiency in languages:

Translations from the French or German rarely interest me; because French and German notions and ideas are so different from the English—that they loose [sic] all their native zest by being translated into that [sic] practical of tongues . . . —I should have preferred reading it in French, but was unable to procure the book. (*Private Papers* 17)

Although she later chose to write her own stories in English, her preference to read books in their original language indicates that almost certainly she read Flaubert, as she read Maupassant, in the original French.

After Kate's graduation from Sacred Heart Academy in June 1868, she began to make personal diary entries in her commonplace book that indicate her continued interest in writing and languages. With a sentiment evoking Edna Pontellier's preference for painting over receiving callers, Kate expressed regret when her literary pursuits had to yield to social obligations:

I am going to receive callers tomorrow—My first winter I expect a great many visits. . . . What a nuisance all this is. I wish it were over. . . . partying, operas, concerts, skating and amusements ad infinitum have so taken up all my time that my dear reading and writing that I love so well has suffered much neglect. (*Private Papers* 64)

An entry dated February 25, 1869, reflects her continued interest in languages:

Yesterday—Feb. 24th—I made my first appearance at the German Reading club, and from this day I hope to be able to speak the language more and more fluently. (68)

She also copied into her book passages in their original language, adding biographical sketches and biographical influences on their writings from Lamartine, Hugo, Goethe, Von Shiller, Gottfried Bürger, Ludwig Uhland, and others. She also read, in translation, the Norwegian authors Ibsen, Alexander Kielland, and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, complaining of the translations:

Norwegian translations always seem to possess a certain crudeness . . .—it must be an idiomatic simplicity for which the English translator seemed unable to find in our language any corresponding expression. It is essential, in order to enjoy these tales . . . to distrust our own point of view; to set aside all prejudice as to nicety of technique; to abandon ourselves into the very atmosphere of the subject. (*Works* 710)

Kate read in translation Bjørnson's *The Fisher Maiden* (1868), a story describing the "development and emancipation" of a woman artist (Seyersted, *Chopin* 30). The main character, Petra, is the illegitimate daughter of Gunlaug, whose "title of 'The Fisher Maiden' descended to the little daughter." Petra "had something of her

mother's strong nature, and she had occasion to use it" (*Fisher* 36). As a young adult, she determines to be an actress. The priest, her foster father, is incensed on discovering her sinful course of study: "And that secret purpose of hers! That career which the priest had so often condemned in her hearing, *she* dared to adorn with the title of God's call to her" (219). Oedegard, one of the three suitors Petra has rejected, convinces the priest that Petra's choice of an unconventional career on the stage instead of marriage is not sinful. Finally relenting, the priest announces the betrothal of Petra to "'Art, the actor's mighty Art'" (294). Oedegard reasons to Petra, "'If what I wanted had happened [that Petra and Oedegard should marry] your whole life would have been spoiled'" (295).

Seyersted points out that shortly after reading this story, Kate wrote "Emancipation: A Life Fable" (1869), a one-page fable of a lion who grew strong and healthy in the cage in which he was born and well fed (*Chopin* 30). One morning, "the door of his cage stood open" and he was free but left to his devices. "So does he live, seeking, finding, joying, suffering. The door which accident had opened is open still, but the cage remains empty forever" (*Works* 37).¹

At about the time she wrote "Emancipation," Kate met Oscar Chopin (Seyersted 30), who enjoyed and encouraged her independent nature (Chenault, personal interview, Dec. 7, 1999). She neglected her commonplace book during her year of courtship. Finally, on May 24, 1870, she commented in it that "in two weeks I am going to be married; married to the right man" (*Private Papers* 99). With her marriage to Oscar

¹Toth indicates that another possible inspiration for "Emancipation" is Victor Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs* (*Unveiling* 51), a story Kate mentions in her commonplace book having "devoured . . . to the very last word" (May 8, 1869, *Private Papers* 84).

Chopin, just one generation removed from France, she deepened her link to her French heritage. On their three-month trip in Europe (1870), Chopin's independent nature thrived, while her travels and perambulations allowed her to socialize with French and German natives and to speak with them in their own tongues.

After their return from Europe, the Chopins moved from St. Louis to New Orleans, and later to Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, both Creole French cultures essential to Kate's later literary development. Violet Harrington Bryant notes that

while Natchitoches Parish was a prevailing setting in the short stories that made Chopin popular in her own time, New Orleans provided a counterpoint to rural Natchitoches in many of them. . . . In *The Awakening* as in the earlier stories, "In and Out of Old Natchitoches" and "Athénaïse," the psychological and sexual awakening which begins in Grand Isle or in Natchitoches Parish comes to fruition in New Orleans and reaches its greatest point of complexity there. (Bryant 55)

In *Degas in New Orleans*, Christopher Benfey elaborates on one possible reason New Orleans so influenced Chopin's writing. Oscar Chopin's cotton business on Carondelet Street was situated next door to the similar business of Michel Musson, Edgar Degas's uncle (153). The Chopins were living in New Orleans during Degas's legendary six-month visit to that city (1872), a visit that was a pivotal moment in his impressionism: "Distracted and stalled in his profession on his arrival, he left the city with a new sense of direction and resolve" (Benfey 4). Oscar and Michel Musson certainly knew each other professionally as well as in their active roles in the White League during its most decisive moments in the period of Reconstruction. Though such a meeting is not documented, it is quite possible that the Chopins and Edgar Degas met socially at the Musson home or elsewhere.

Chopin's later essays indicate that she was familiar with the impressionistic movement in literature. In her essay "'Crumbling Idols' by Hamlin Garland'" (1894), she faults Garland's suggestion that the artist "free himself from . . . conventionalism" and turn instead to "Life and Nature." However, she commends his

excellent chapter . . . [that] deals with impressionism in painting. It will be found interesting and even instructive to many who have rather vague and confused notions of what impressionism means. Mr. Garland has gone over heart and soul to the Impressionists. He feels and sees with them; being in close sympathy with their individualism, their abandonment of the traditional and conventional in the interest of "truth." (*Works* 694)

Although Chopin praises Garland's chapter on the impressionists, she implies that he has "gone over" to the impressionists as though they are realists, since he "turns his back on models furnished by man" (693). For her, however, part of the power of the impressionists is that they are not realists; impressionists express something they can experience only through "art" rather than in "nature." Chopin's implication is that we cannot see everything that is true by looking objectively at nature.

In her essay, "Emile Zola's 'Lourdes'" (1894), she uses her familiarity with impressionism to illustrate her point of view in variance with Zola's:

I once heard a devotee of impressionism admit . . . that, while he himself had never seen in nature the peculiar yellows and reds therein depicted, he was convinced that Monet had painted them because he saw them and because they were true. With something of a kindred faith in the sincerity of all Mons. Zola's work, I am not yet at all times ready to admit its truth, which is only equivalent to saying that our points of view differ, that truth rests upon a shifting basis and is apt to be kaleidoscopic. (*Works* 697)

Chopin does not accept the book's "truth," though *Lourdes* is a truthful history thinly disguised as a novel. Chopin's implication is that facts and figures alone cannot reveal truth. In the realist belief that language mirrors life and that facts reveal truth, the

proper rhetorical figure is metonymy or synecdoche. The realist vision implies that if we can see a part, we will understand the whole. The essence of romance's vision is expressed instead in analogy or metaphor, suggesting that there are dimensions of the "real" that we can never directly know or express. Roman Jakobson, in his useful discussion of the terms as they apply to two types of aphasia, perhaps best elaborates this concept:

The primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called "realistic" trend, which belongs to an intermediary stage between the decline of romanticism and the rise of symbolism and is opposed to both. Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synecdochic details. In the scene of Anna Karenina's suicide Tolstoj's artistic attention is focused on the heroine's handbag; and in *War and Peace* the synecdoches "hair on the upper lip" or "bare shoulders" are used by the same writer to stand for the female characters to whom these features belong. (Jakobson and Halle 78)

In the realist vision, metonymy is an exemplum based on contiguity. If we can be made to understand "this" story or "these" forces, we should be able to understand the whole they represent. In the romance vision, the analogic representation is based on similarities and implies that something we can never directly know or represent exists beyond those similarities.

Jakobson explains that the processes are not unique to verbal art: "A salient example from the history of painting is the manifestly metonymical orientation of cubism, where the object is transformed into a set of synecdoches" (78). On the other hand, in "surrealism" and, I would add, in the earlier impressionism, a metaphoric or symbolic representation implies something unknowable and unrepresentable in

“reality.” The impressionism of artists such as Monet and Degas inspired the movement toward impressionism in fiction, characterized by the addition of the analogue to convey symbolically more than could be seen with the physical eye. Chopin recognizes that we yearn for those dimensions of reality that are unknowable and unrepresentable; if we dismiss the yearning as illusory or insignificant, we have dismissed or reduced to insignificant the core of our being.

The influence of the French impressionists on Chopin’s fiction is often noted, particularly in *The Awakening*. The impressionism Edna is developing in Grand Isle, for example, is one symbol of her awakening sensuality and awareness of self. Her “old sketches” (54) in New Orleans serve as an example of her earlier realistic skills: Adèle comments, “This basket of apples! never have I seen anything more lifelike” (*Awakening* 56). At Grand Isle, however, Edna’s realism evolves into a sensuous impressionistic portrait of Adèle. Deborah Barker comments on Edna’s painting that “bore no resemblance to Madame Ratignolle” (*Awakening* 13):

The emphasis on an “impressionistic” use of color and light to create a subjective rendering of nature . . . is similar to the qualities of Edna’s vision of Adèle and the “gleam of the fading day” that enriched “her splendid color.” (Barker 65, *Awakening* 13)

Edna’s move toward more impressionistic painting during her summer in Grand Isle parallels her awakening sensuousness and sense of her self that also begins to occur in that locale (Barker 65). As her awareness focuses inward, so her mode of representation becomes a more “subjective rendering.”

Like Edna in her painting, Chopin also would become impressionistic in her writing. The opening impressionistic image of Edna is from afar, under the “pink-lined shelter” of her “white sunshade that was advancing at snail’s pace from the beach . . .

between the gaunt trunks of the water-oaks and across the stretch of yellow camomile” (4). The view of the gulf, “melting hazily into the blue of the horizon” (4), is shattered by Léonce’s scolding at Edna’s sunburn. During Edna’s dinner party, Miss Mayblunt’s lament at being unable “to paint in color rather than in words” (89) is followed by Chopin’s impressionistic painting of the scene “in words”:

Splendor conveyed by a [table] cover of pale yellow satin under strips of lace-work, . . . wax candles in massive brass candelabra, burning softly under yellow silk shades; full, fragrant roses, yellow and red; . . . crystal which glittered like the gems which the women wore.

. . . Outside the soft monotonous splash of a fountain . . . penetrated into the room with the heavy odor of jessamine.

The golden shimmer of Edna’s satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. (86, 88)

Sensory images symbolize and heighten Edna’s awareness of her self. Rather than describing the setting with synecdochic details, Chopin evokes colors, sounds, and fragrances symbolic of and integral to Edna’s emotional state. Influence of impressionist painters on such ‘word painting’ can be linked particularly to Chopin’s development during her years in New Orleans, and possibly directly to Degas.

Although Chopin’s years in New Orleans were essential to her development, they were cut short because of financial difficulties. In 1879, after several bad years in the cotton business, the Chopins, with their five sons and quadroon servant Alexandrine, and expecting their daughter Lélia, moved from New Orleans to Cloutierville, a locale that was to be for Kate a hotbed of themes and characters. Unfortunately, Oscar Chopin died in Dec. 1882 at age thirty-eight, leaving thirty-one-year-old Kate a widow, but strong and independent.

Thereafter, Kate deftly managed his general store and plantations in Cloutierville, finally selling all but two small plantations in 1884 to pay off Oscar’s

debts and moving back with her mother in St. Louis. The next year, her mother died, leaving her “prostrated with grief” (Rankin 105). Chopin’s daughter Lélia wrote later of her mother’s profound sense of loss: “I think the tragic death of her father early in her life, of her much loved brothers [two had died young], the loss of her young husband and mother, left a stamp of sadness on her which was never lost” (qtd in Rankin 35, Seyersted 48). Lélia indicates that Chopin’s successes and satisfactions in her vocation never entirely eclipsed her sense of loss.

Chopin wrote in her diary, May 22, 1894, after the publication of *Bayou Folk* in March:

If it were possible for my husband and my mother to come back to earth, I feel that I would unhesitatingly give up every thing that has come into my life since they left it and join my existence again with theirs. To do that, I would have to forget the past ten years of my growth—my real growth. But I would take back a little wisdom with me; it would be the spirit of perfect acquiescence. (*Private Papers* 183)

Chopin’s new “wisdom”—that is, “perfect acquiescence” to the conditions of mortal existence—apparently was not yet a characteristic during her marriage. The fact that she would now not only acquiesce but also sacrifice her “real growth”—except as it was concentrated in the “wisdom” of her acquiescence—indicates that her life as a widow lacked complete fulfillment. She testifies to the truth of Emily Dickinson’s assertion: “Perception of an object costs/Precise the Object’s loss” (Poem 1071, Dickinson 486). Chopin was aware now that human existence entails unquenchable yearning; without that knowledge, we can never acquiesce to the good of mortal existence. Such a condition, rather than differentiating the sexes, identifies us as human.

Even though we find autobiographical elements both in “The Story of an Hour” (April 19, 1894) written a month before her diary entry and in *The Awakening* (1899)

published five years later, we can conclude from this diary entry that Chopin did not share unalloyed Louise's sense of being freed nor Edna's sense of being circumscribed by her family. Chopin's works never entirely defined her experience or her sense of herself, however much she may have sympathized with her characters. In *The Awakening*, an implicit Creole characteristic is the understanding of yearning as a condition of existence that one must accommodate oneself to. Whereas Edna can find nothing to correspond to her yearning, Adèle and the other Creoles seem to understand Edna's yearnings as Edna does not. Adèle would not have been able to understand if she, too, had not had yearnings; like Chopin, Adèle acquiesces to such yearning as a condition of being human.

Chopin might have acquired her new wisdom of acquiescence in part from the philosophers she was studying. William Schuyler indicated that, even before her move to St. Louis, "the works of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer were her daily companions" (Schuyler 116, qtd in *Miscellany* 117). After her move to St. Louis, Dr. Frederick Kolbenheyer, an intimate friend noted for his "radical political views" and "determined agnosticism" (Toth, *Chopin* 132), encouraged her to read "such philosophers as Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer" (Seyersted, *Chopin* 49). Kolbenheyer, impressed with the writing ability apparent in her letters from Louisiana, encouraged her to combine her new knowledge of philosophy and the writing talent she had been developing since her youth, and to begin to write fiction.

Because of her reading in philosophy and her discussions with Kolbenheyer, Rankin notes, "She no longer remained a Catholic in any real or practical way. . . . She

became, within a year after her mother's death, a Catholic in name only" (49).²

Although we never get the sense from her stories that Chopin entirely abandons her early religious convictions, by the time she begins writing her diary, "Impressions," in 1894, she asserts that God can be found most immediately in nature and in natural impulses. She explains, "My love and reverence for pure unadulterated nature is growing daily" (June, 1894, *Private Papers* 187). A month later, she comments:

I want neither books nor men; they make me suffer. Can one of them talk to me like the night—the Summer night? Like the stars or the caressing wind? . . .

. . . How wise [the katydids] are. They do not chatter like people. They tell me only: "sleep, sleep, sleep." The wind rippled the maple leaves like little warm love thrills.

Why do fools cumber the earth? . . . Should I ask a young fool who was born yesterday and will die tomorrow to tell me things of Christ? I would rather ask the stars: they have seen him. (July, 1894, *Works* 366)

Love, too, is a part of nature, and therefore "divine." Chopin comments four years later in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, in answer to the question "Is Love Divine?" (Jan. 16, 1898):

It is as difficult to distinguish between the divine love and the natural, animal life, as it is to explain just why we love at all. . . .

One really never knows the exact, definite thing which excites love for any one person, and one can never truly know whether this love is the result of circumstances or whether it is predestination. I am inclined to think that love springs from animal instinct, and therefore is, in a measure, divine. One can never resolve to love this man, this woman or child, and then carry out the resolution unless one feels irresistibly drawn by an indefinable current of magnetism. . . . I am sure we all feel that love—true, pure love, is an uncontrollable emotion that allows of no analyzation and no vivisection. (*Private Papers* 219)

² George Chopin's wife disapproved of her mother-in-law for her departure from Catholicism, though George defended his mother as being ahead of her time and "too darn smart" to remain Catholic (Toth, *Unveiling* 240). However, the "family story" that Chopin was seen entering a Catholic church shortly before her death (Seyersted, *Chopin* 185), suggests at least a return to beliefs of her youth. Although her obituary omits mention of any attendant priest at her deathbed, a requiem mass was held at New Cathedral Chapel and she was buried in Calvary Cemetery (St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, Aug. 22, 1904, in Seyersted, *Chopin* 185, 226 n. 56) "along the Way of the Second Dolor" (Toth, *Unveiling* 240), another indication that she never entirely abandoned Catholicism.

Chopin expresses here a sense of love that persists throughout her fiction. Although she relinquishes the artifice of *The Days of Bruce*, in her writing she recognizes an unexplainable mystery of yearning that manifests itself as love, an apprehension retained from her youthful experience with the romance. She implies that women as well as men experience such yearning and have the same choices and capacity to act on that yearning, even though the choices they make do not necessarily correspond to a conventional understanding of right and wrong. In "The Storm," for example, Chopin portrays desire as a wholly natural experience for both males and females. Both by acknowledging that the woman has sexual passion as strong as the man's and by not suggesting dire consequences for either when they yield to their passion, she departs from conventional moral standards. Both Alcée and Calixta simply yield to a force as natural as the storm. Edna Pontellier, on the other hand, a different sensibility than Calixta, is unable to acquiesce to her yearnings without experiencing guilt. Edna's guilt, however, is directed toward her other lover, Robert. Ironically, she feels no similar guilt toward her husband to whom conventionally she would owe fidelity.

The new philosophies gave credence to Chopin's evolving beliefs as her writing became increasingly naturalistic. She almost certainly read Schopenhauer's essay "The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes." In it, he contends that

all love . . . is rooted in the sexual impulse alone. . . . That which is decided by [the ultimate end of all love affairs] is . . . *the composition of the next generation*. . . . The sexual impulse . . . knows how to . . . deceive our consciousness; for nature requires this stratagem to attain its ends.
(Schopenhauer 332-33)

While she would have agreed that love is a natural impulse, she would have objected to Schopenhauer's conception of a deceitful nature whose "ultimate end" is procreation

alone and to Schopenhauer's implicit omission of the many types of love that are not rooted in the sexual impulse. Such love is portrayed in the intimate relationship between Adèle and Edna, for example.

According to Bert Bender, Chopin also "read Darwin more closely than did most of her contemporaries, and much more closely than her many interpreters have realized! . . . especially . . . his theory of sexual selection" (459). But while she agreed essentially with Darwin's theory, "she quarreled with his analysis of . . . the female's passive and modest role in sexual relations" (461).

Darwin's related theory of the "laws of inheritance" was also essential to Chopin's development toward naturalism. Chopin, however, takes Darwin's theory a step further, "exploit[ing] a possibility that he allows the female but does not himself develop" (Bender 470), since Darwin's "Victorian sensibility" would have proscribed exploring female desire as being "independent of the drive to propagate the species" (462).

Bender cites *The Awakening* as Chopin's "most extensive and explicit" reference to *The Descent of Man* (461): "Chopin's point seems clear when she has the Colonel imagine that 'he had bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capability'" (Bender 470, *Awakening* 68). After the Colonel's visit, we notice the more masculine traits Edna decidedly acquired from him, such as her aptitude at the racetrack, where the "fever of the game . . . got into her blood and into her brain like an intoxicant" (74). We also notice Darwinian traits most often attributed to the male in her "awakening sensuousness" (76) and the "animalism" Arobin caused to stir "impatiently within her," with no Darwinian "blush of modesty" (*Awakening* 78, Bender 470): although "Alcée Arobin was absolutely nothing to her . . . his presence, his manners, the

warmth of his glance, . . . the touch of his lips . . . acted like a narcotic upon her” (77). Certainly in *The Awakening*, and again in her later story “The Storm” Chopin explicitly reveals female desire as natural and “independent of the drive to propagate the species.”

Chopin’s placement at the very core of the nineteenth century religious crisis introduced by these revolutionary philosophers certainly loosened even more the tenuous hold on her of any conventional conceptions of morality. Yet while she eschewed “advising” or “preach[ing]” (*Works* 709, 702), there are implicit judgments in her works that indicate moral convictions.³ In *The Awakening*, for example, Alcée Arobin is an example of purely animal instinct and, as such, is not an example of the primal passion Chopin celebrates. Additionally, Chopin implies in her first novel that Thérèse is “at fault” for imposing her judgment on circumstances she does not fully comprehend. While Chopin never takes the assertions of Darwin and Schopenhauer solely on the basis of their word, she assumes a qualified influence. Therefore, her naturalism reflects love as a primitive or primal instinct even while she retains the romance notion that it is the divine center of a fully human life.

* * * * *

As Chopin’s knowledge and qualified acceptance of the philosophers and her familiarity with naturalist writers contributed to the growth of her naturalism, so her familiarity with impressionism and the romance, her residual religious convictions, and

³ Several critics use the slippery term, “amoral” when defining Chopin’s departure from conventional morals. Seyersted argues that “Chopin joined the naturalists in treating human foibles amorally” (*Chopin* 90). Chung-Eun Ryu agrees that to Chopin “nature is amoral while morality is man-made and relative” (133). He adds that *The Awakening* “is an amoral, . . . avantgarde [sic] novel that in places transcends those French masters” (134). However, defining “amoral” as “having no moral principles” (*Oxford Modern English Dictionary*, 1996), we see that Chopin places herself above the pale of amorality thus defined. Since she is determined not to “preach” (*Works* 702), she does not presume authority to judge characters’ actions. Still, we cannot dismiss her pervading “moral principles.”

her emergent conception of God in nature tempered and softened her naturalism. As her writing matured under these influences, she became a well-known literary figure.

In the European tradition, Chopin began holding a salon on Thursdays that included such locally prominent figures as William Schuyler, Alexander De Menil, and Henry Dumay (Seyersted, *Chopin* 63-64), among others:

Kate Chopin's social circle, the habitués of her salon, was full of newspaper people. William Marion ("Billy") Reedy, brash editor and guiding spirit of *Reedy's Mirror*. . . . *St. Louis Life's* warm and generous editor, Sue V. Moore. John A. Dillon and Dr. Kolbenheyer were among the founders of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. . . . Charles Deyo and George S. Johns continued writing for the *Post Dispatch*, while Florence Hayward wrote for its rival, the *Globe Democrat*. (Toth, *Private Papers* 217)

These persons, wanting to "promote Kate Chopin and their city" (Seyersted 64), praised her and invited her stories for publication in their various periodicals. By 1894, she had already completed her first novel, *At Fault* (1890), and published several stories serially and in the volume *Bayou Folk* (1894). Her influential "social circle" (*Private Papers* 217) was a springboard to national recognition. Yet more important to her renewed and lasting recognition was her qualified sense of the philosophers and her interaction with American and French writers. For example, as she revised Howells's concept of marriage as a social imperative in her first novel and Flaubert's concept of feminine and human yearning as invalidated in her final novel,⁴ she revised Schopenhauer's and Darwin's insights to include male and female passion as both natural and divine.

Recent critics agree that *At Fault*, a copy of which she sent to Howells, then editor of *Harper's*, was a reaction to *A Modern Instance* (1882). Seyersted argues that

⁴ Chopin wrote and later destroyed an unsuccessful second novel, *Young Dr. Gosse and Theo* (1891).

Mrs. Chopin felt very strongly on this point [that basic improvement was impossible]. She was highly irritated with the facile idealism displayed in so much contemporary fiction. She may even have objected to such serious works as Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* and Howells' *A Modern Instance* with their weight on the ennobling aspect of fulfilling marital responsibilities. . . . The result was *At Fault*, one of the first American novels to deal with divorce." (*Chopin* 91)

As several critics have noted, many of Chopin's short stories and her final novel were also conscious interactions with various authors she had read. Emily Toth notes that "with Garland, as with other writers like Mary E. Wilkins, Kate Chopin seemed to be holding a dialogue: responding to their writing, refining what they said and how they said it" (Toth, *Chopin* 248). Toth also notes that "After the Winter" "sounds much more like Maupassant than Missouri" (*Unveiling* 132). Similarly, Per Seyersted says that Chopin's story "Regret" takes the "Maupassantian theme [of "La Reine Hortense"] and transform[s] it into her own, surpassing the master in technique and in depth of vision" (Seyersted, *Chopin* 125).

Seyersted also implies that *The Awakening* was a reconsideration of *Madame Bovary*: "we cannot prove that [Chopin] read, say, Flaubert and Tolstoy. All indications are, however, that she was well acquainted with the classics and that she familiarized herself with all important new books as they appeared" (*Chopin* 86). Seyersted argues that similarities in "theme, incident, and detail . . . might justify us in calling *The Awakening* an American *Madame Bovary*. Mrs. Chopin did not use the French classic as a model, however, but only as a point of departure, giving the story an entirely new emphasis" (138). Toth agrees that "[Chopin] and the members of her salon certainly knew her famous predecessor Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*," adding that "Flaubert regards Emma Bovary as a specimen, a shallow woman with little in her head

but romantic dreams. Kate Chopin saw the world differently, through the eyes of a woman" (*Unveiling* 217).

Chopin published two novels and around one hundred short stories, but her success was short-lived, lasting only ten years (1889-1899). *The Awakening* (1899) left her in virtual obscurity. As Toth notes, that novel was never banned (*Unveiling* xx); but while Chopin received some favorable comments, she was also widely censured. Complaints were that Edna's love was not "gentle" but "sensual and devilish" (May 4, 1899, *Mirror* IX 6); that the book was "morbid" and "failed to teach a moral lesson" (May 13, St. Louis *Globe Democrat*); that the subject was "too strong drink for moral babes" (St. Louis *The Republic*, qtd in Rankin 173). Alexander De Menil, a St. Louis editor of "genteel magazines" (Seyersted, *Chopin* 63) who knew Chopin from childhood, refused to review the book in his *Hyperion*, and "social acquaintances began to shun her" (Ewell, *Chopin* 25, Seyersted, *Chopin* 175).

In the aftermath of her disappointment, Chopin wrote "A Reflection," in which she muses on "that moving procession that has left me by the roadside! . . . What matter if souls and bodies are falling beneath the feet of the ever-pressing multitude! . . . Oh! I could weep at being left by the wayside" (Nov. 1899, *Works* 622). In 1900, after retiring to a quieter, more reflective life, Chopin was again disappointed when both "Ti Démon" (Nov. 1899) and the collection *A Vocation and a Voice* (Feb. 1900) were returned unpublished. Although she was able to have three more stories published, her career was over, probably as a result of her bold assertions of female desire. On August 20, 1904, at the age of fifty-three, Chopin suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died two days later, in virtual obscurity.

Thanks to her several biographers, however, Chopin is no longer obscure, and her popularity continues to grow. Yet even today, Chopin is overlooked or given brief mention in most studies of the development of literary realism and naturalism.

Chopin's writing reflects her life experiences, her early encounters with the sentimental romance, her French Catholicism, the impressionism of her young adulthood, and her readings in science and philosophy as an adult. As a marriage of French and American realism and naturalism, tempered by elements of romance and impressionism, her work contributed to the development of a less deterministic naturalism in America.

Chopin Responds to American Realists: Departing from Determinism

From *At Fault*

“Religion—no religion, whar you gwine
live ef you don’ live in de worl’?
Gwine live up in de moon?”
(Aunt Belindy, *Works* 841)

In her works, Chopin held a dialogue with many contemporary American authors, including female local color realists such as Ruth McEnery Stuart and Mary E. Wilkins, as well as male realists such as Hamlin Garland and W. D. Howells. She also indicated the influence of other writers on her work. For example, she advocated that aspiring writers study other authors: “I know of no one better than Miss Jewett to study for technique and nicety of construction. I don’t mention Mary E. Wilkins for she is such a great genius and genius is not to be studied” (Toth and Seyersted, *Private Papers* 181). In a letter to *The Republic*, she defended her use of the word “depot” in *At Fault*: “Wm. Dean Howells employs the [word depot] to indicate a ‘railway station,’ so I am hardly ready to believe the value of ‘At Fault’ marred by following so safe a precedent” (Oct. 18, 1890, *Private Papers* 201). She imagined that Maupassant spoke directly to her: “I even like to think that he appeals to me alone. . . . Someway I like to cherish the delusion that he has spoken to no one else so directly as he does to me” (*Works* 701). When studying Chopin, it is essential to examine this dialogue she acknowledges.

In her stories and novels, Chopin often adapts the plots of other writers to reflect her concerns; for example, in her first novel, *At Fault* (1890), she uses a subplot of *A Modern Instance* (1882) to craft a response to the idealism Howells inveighs against

even as he upholds it. Whereas Chopin gives a place to the mysterious force of love as a real dimension of human life rather than as an “ideal” or abstract concept, Howells, in *A Modern Instance*, reduces “love” to a biological force among other material forces by which human actions are determined. From his deterministic perspective in the novel, all considerations of love as the basis for any human act must be viewed as illusory and “ideal.” Nevertheless, while Howells does not validate love, he implicitly validates marriage as a social ideal to be upheld with or without the presence of love. In *At Fault* Chopin critiques his sense that, lacking love, the ideal of marriage should still be upheld.

Throughout her career, while Chopin consistently critiques works such as *A Modern Instance* that deny the force of love, she responds positively to works that emphasize that force. For example, her deep and lasting admiration for Stuart and Stuart’s sympathetic portrayal of love had a profound effect on Chopin’s entire career and her own insistence on a portrayal of love as natural and divine. Before discussing *At Fault* as a conscious reconsideration of Howells’s *A Modern Instance*, therefore, I will look first at influences on Chopin’s work by the female American writers she praised, particularly Wilkins and Stuart, then by the male writer, Hamlin Garland. Although these responses followed *At Fault* by one to two years, by briefly examining them before my longer discussion of the novel, I hope to clarify Chopin’s understanding of the positive force of love that constitutes also her critique of the lack of that force in *A Modern Instance*.

Chopin praised Wilkins’s “genius,” particularly in *Pembroke* (1894), a deterministic vision of life in the New England village of the same name. Among

Wilkins's achievements are a portrayal of the constraints to communication imposed by a Calvinist puritanical society and a satire on the overweening pride of such a society.

Chopin defended this "powerful" novel, faulting Wilkins's critics:

Mary Wilkins' *Pembroke* is the most profound, the most powerful piece of fiction of its kind that has ever come from the American press. And I find such papers as the N.Y. Herald—the N.O. Times Democrat devoting half a column to senseless abuse of the disagreeable characters which figure in the book. No feeling for the spirit of the work, the subtle genius which created it. (June 7, 1894, *Private Papers* 187)

Louis Budd agrees with Chopin's defense, elaborating further that "Mary E. Wilkins, rather than ridiculing what she perceived as a dying breed of small acreage farmers further restricted by religiosity, found cause to respect their quirkiness and to memorialize the sturdy yet insightfully skeptical women" (Budd 24). Chopin similarly, and perhaps even more sympathetically, memorialized and respected the "quirkiness" she found among the Creoles and Acadians. Her daughter Lélia explains that Chopin had loved "the simple people around her . . . for no matter how keenly they appealed to her wonderful sense of humor, she always touched on their weaknesses fondly and tolerantly, never unkindly" (qtd. in Toth, *Chopin* 147).

In Wilkins's "A New England Nun," (c. 1887,¹ volume, May 1891) and Chopin's "A No Account Creole," (*Century* accepted Aug. 3, 1891, printed May 12, 1893; *Bayou Folk* 1894) we find such distinct personalities portrayed by means of slight variations on the same plot: the expression of love for another overheard by the betrothed. In "A New England Nun," Louisa Ellis overhears Joe Daggett's expression of love to Lily Dyer. Rather than being distressed, Louisa is relieved that her pristine

¹ No complete Wilkins bibliography is extant. However, since her stories appeared regularly in *Harper's Magazine*, it is likely that "A New England Nun" appeared first in that publication. Edward Foster supplies evidence it was read as early as 1887 (82).

life need not be intruded upon by a man who “tracked in a good deal of dust” (5). She broke the engagement with no remorse:

If Louisa Ellis had sold her birthright, she did not know it. . . . Serenity and placid narrowness had become to her as the birthright itself. She gazed ahead through a long reach of future days strung together like pearls in a rosary, every one like the others, and all smooth and flawless and innocent, and her heart went up in thankfulness. (17)

In “A No Account Creole,” Chopin replaces Louisa with Placide Santiene and Joe with Euphrasie, locating the center of concern in the female consciousness. We will see this same shift into the female consciousness in her response to Howells.

Euphrasie’s love for Offdean grows over time much as Joe’s love for Lily Dyer grows. Chopin, however, allows us a more internal perspective of that love as it is growing:

Waves of happiness were sweeping through the soul and body of the girl as she sat there in the drowsy afternoon near the man whom she loved. It mattered not what they talked about, or whether they talked at all. They were both scintillant with feeling. (*Works* 94)

Like Wilkins’s Louisa, Placide overhears the expression of love of his betrothed to another. Placide reacts first with anger, “possessed by only one thought, . . . to put an end to this man” (101). After Offdean reasons with him, however, he grows in awareness and retreats, allowing Euphrasie to respond to her love for another. By leaving Euphrasie he saves her, she reasons, “‘From [the] sin’” (102) of marrying a man she does not love. By borrowing the plot and shifting the center of concern, Chopin comments on the force of love in her female character. At the same time she allows her male character to grow in awareness.

Wilkins’s Louisa also loves, but Louisa’s love is for an “order” that has become the routine of her life and with which she does not wish to part, rather than for another human being. She is relieved to be freed of her obligation to Joe, who could only upset

that order. The irony is that his long absence from her has left her capable of loving only that order. Placide, on the other hand, is deeply hurt by the knowledge that his betrothed loves another. He must examine the implications and make a conscious effort to concede. Chopin's story is a response to Wilkins's poignant expression of Joe's love for Lily as it differs from Louisa's love for autonomy. Yet the force of love is essential in both stories.

In Chopin's later story, "The Story of an Hour" (1894), the protagonist experiences feelings similar to those of Louisa, who anticipates "a long reach of future days . . . all smooth and flawless and innocent, and her heart went up in thankfulness" (17). The similarly named Louise Mallard, who believes her husband is dead, also welcomes "a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome" (*Works* 353). While Chopin validates love openly expressed in "A No Account Creole," in this later story, like Wilkins, she also validates a desire for autonomy. Chopin agrees with Wilkins's sense that love need not exclusively be for another person. We will see this notion of the desire for autonomy expanded in *The Awakening*, in which Edna, too, struggles with the awareness that the force of love and longing in her life is not directed at a particular person.

* * * * *

Chopin also admired the "marked excellence" (*Works* 711) of Ruth McEnery Stuart, the only one of Chopin's "literary colleagues of national importance" we have a record of their meeting (Seyersted, *Chopin* 63). The two met at a Wednesday Club while Stuart was on a promotional tour in St. Louis (Feb. 1897). A week or two later,

Chopin praised Stuart's "natural and sympathetic manner" (*Works* 712), especially praising her novelette, *Carlotta's Intended* (*Lippincott's Magazine* 1890, volume 1891), which she had read several years earlier. The novelette, she explains, "left an impression on my mind which has never been disturbed" (*Works* 711):

Sympathy and insight are the qualities, I believe, which make her stories lovable, which make them linger in the memory like pleasant human experiences—happy realities that we are loath to part with. (712)

Finding in Stuart's stories "the same wholesome, human note sounding through and through them," Chopin wrote that she would have enjoyed making "further acquaintance with sweet Carlotta" (711). The fact that Chopin expresses such profound admiration for Stuart justifies further examination of Stuart's influence, specifically her "sympathy," "insight," and "wholesome, human note" in portraying characters.

Stuart wrote most often about either the African-American minority or the Italians and Sicilians of New Orleans, focusing on the latter groups in *Carlotta's Intended*. From the 1870s to the 1890s, while Stuart was living in New Orleans, and during part of which Chopin was also living there (1870-1879), an active Mafia community resulted in Decatur Street being nicknamed "Vendetta Alley" (Taylor 107). Chopin reportedly "roam[ed] through the picturesque and cosmopolitan city" observing "Creoles, . . . Negroes, . . . Italians, [and] Irish" (Seyersted, *Chopin* 41). Although Chopin's characters were most often of French descent, she certainly appreciated Stuart's contention that the "heterogeneous population . . . made [the] most vivid appeal" (Stuart, "Backgrounds" 624). She praised Stuart's portrayal of Italian and Irish characters as being "singularly true to nature. Their fidelity must appear striking to anyone who lived in New Orleans in familiar touch with the life which the author so

graphically depicts” (*Works* 711).

In Stuart’s novelette, Carlotta, a “feminine” or “traditional” woman like Chopin’s Euphrasie in “A No Account Creole,” would have kept her promise to her intended. As in “A New England Nun” and “A No Account Creole,” however, Carlotta’s intended overhears her expression of her love for another.

Carlotta’s secret “intended” is Pat Rooney, an older Irishman. He has saved her from marriage to Socola, a Mafia boss. After Socola agrees instead to marry “the other Carlotta, the cousin” (44) to save face, Socola threatens, “‘*if one word [of Carlotta’s rejection] passes that door—the knives of a hundred of Mafia’s sons are ready to avenge it*’” (*Carlotta’s* 44-45). By defending Carlotta’s name when he overhears rumors about her, Pat subjects himself to Socola’s threat. Moments before two Sicilians can carry out his death sentence, he overhears Carlotta’s confession to Giuseppe, her handsome Italian suitor: “‘I run away with you, and then when I see [Pat] I am sorry, and speak kind with him, but all the same I see you’” (96).

Helen Taylor notes that Stuart might have feared Mafia reprisal for her bold exposé, “since she does not allow Pat to perish by a Mafia hand” (Taylor 119). Rather, in “a scene redolent with romantic pathos” (119), Pat, moments before he would have been assassinated, falls into the Mississippi River while saving a stranded kitten. His death frees him from his grief: “‘Sure we’re in the same boat, Kitty, . . . we’re wan too many in a crowded worrld’” (100). At the same time, his death frees Carlotta from her betrothal and from feelings of guilt for loving Giuseppe:

And on any All-Saints’ Day, Carlotta and Giuseppe, with their flock of beautiful children, may be seen to stop [at Pat’s grave] for a while, leaving a bouquet of plush-topped coxcombs and a cross of white chrysanthemums. (102)

Seyersted argues that,

When Kate Chopin did not object to the sentimentality of this novelette, it was perhaps because she agreed that the young heroine should be freed from the unnatural obligation to her old fiancé so that she could marry a man her own age. (*Chopin* 212-13)

However, Chopin never suggests that she objects to Stuart's "sentimentality"; rather, by praising Stuart's "sympathetic manner" and "human note" in her portrayal of characters such as "sweet Carlotta," she implies that sentimentality is what she finds compelling in the story. Nor does she ever imply that age is factored into love. Perhaps a more accurate expression of her sense is that love is not born of duty but "springs from animal instinct" (*Private Papers* 219).

Carlotta might have been Chopin's model for Euphrasie as she revised the character to make her story more acceptable for publication in *Century Magazine*. Her original story, "Euphrasie" (1888), later titled "A No Account Creole" (rewritten 1891), is no longer extant, so we cannot know how she changed Euphrasie's character. We do know that she wrote to R. W. Gilder thanking him for his suggestions for revising the story:

The weakness which you found in "A No-Account Creole" is the one which I felt.

. . . I hope I have succeeded in making the girl's character clearer. I have tried to convey the impression of sweetness and strength, keen sense of right, and physical charm beside. (July 12, 1891, *Private Papers* 203)

Carlotta and Pat might have provided Chopin models for exploring love in her story with "sympathy and insight." Certainly love in Stuart's novelette is significant and intense. For example, when Pat encourages Carlotta to marry someone her own age, she expresses her love for him: "now when I am mo' bigger an' know better, now when

I know to love, you turn your back!” (30). He explains to her, “’twas the love in my heart that sint me on a retrate from ye” (31). As she leaves the room reassured, he exclaims,

“God bless ye—and God bless ye,” and he . . . sank upon a chair, and in a moment was sobbing—and sobbing.
. . . he was so madly in love, so deliriously jubilant over her loyalty, which, no matter what should come, was now wholly his, that he wept from a full surrender of himself to his conflicting emotions. (34)

Stuart’s internal perspective on Pat’s love for Carlotta could have influenced Chopin’s previously noted perspective on Euphrasie’s love as “waves of happiness were sweeping through [Euphrasie’s] soul and body” (94).

In Chopin’s story, Placide overhears Euphrasie’s expression of love for Offdean: “all the wretchedness of the past months together with the sharp distress of the moment voiced itself in a sob: ‘O God—O my God, he’p me!’” (*Works* 99). Instead of a dramatic death scene, Chopin ends her story by having Placide yield his “legal” claim as her betrothed to the superior claims of love that he recognizes both in his love for Euphrasie and in her love for Offdean: “‘The way to love a woman is to think first of her happiness’” (*Works* 101). Even in this early story, Chopin is in dialogue with other writers as she adapts the plot of the love triangle to examine her female protagonist’s burgeoning love and to allow her male protagonist to grow in awareness. Chopin’s dialogues with Wilkins and Stuart reveal her celebration of the love expressed by these two writers and her understanding of love as a divine force.

* * * * *

Chopin also held a dialogue with American male realists such as Hamlin Garland. Chopin praised Garland’s short stories as “most subtly reflect[ing] the western

spirit,” and called Garland “one whose soul is close to nature. He believes in himself and follows his own light” (*Private Papers* 225).

Chopin probably appreciated Garland’s stories of pioneer women much like his own mother. Garland, who had been living, studying, and teaching in Boston, visited his parents’ home in southern Dakota in 1887: “I found my mother imprisoned in a small cabin . . . with no expectation of ever living anywhere else. . . . The fact that at twenty-seven I was without power to aid my mother in any substantial way added to my despairing mood” (“Preface,” *Main-Traveled Roads* ix-x). During the two weeks he spent harvesting his father’s wheat crop, Garland’s mind “teemed with subjects for fiction” (x).

Chopin almost certainly read the result of Garland’s visit home, *Main-Traveled Roads* (1891). The plot of the first story of volume one, “A Branch Road” (1888, volume 1891), appears in two of her own stories, “A Visit to Avoyelles” (*Bayou Folk* 1894) and “In Sabine” (*Vogue* Aug. 1, 1892, *Bayou Folk* 1894). Chopin responds to the force of love evident in this, one of Garland’s most sentimental stories.

In Garland’s “A Branch Road,” Will, a “young, jubilant, and happy lover,” leaves Agnes after a misunderstanding caused by their inability to communicate their feelings. When he returns seven years later, he finds her married to and abused by his rival, Ed Kinney. Seven years of mistreatment by Ed and Ed’s parents have taken their toll: “She was worn and wasted incredibly . . . and her trembling hands were worn, discolored, and lumpy at the joints” (*Main* 40). Will realizes “that she was a dying woman unless she had rest and care” (46). After the family has gone to church, leaving

her to do the chores, Will beseeches her to escape with him and get a divorce in “some other state” (50).

“What will people say?”
... “They’d say stay here and be killed by inches. I say you’ve had your share of suffering.” (50)

After much persuasion, Agnes, her child in her arms, agrees to leave with him. In one of Garland’s most romantic and unconventional endings, the pair escapes, and “the world lay before them” (53).

Although Chopin almost certainly sympathized with Agnes, in her similar story, “A Visit to Avoyelles,” Mentine does not leave her abusive husband. Much like Will and Agnes, Doudouce and Mentine had parted seven years earlier. Doudouce “knew well enough Mentine would have married him seven years ago had not Jules Trodon come up from Avoyelles and captivated her with his handsome eyes and pleasant speech” (*Works* 228). Rather than yielding to angry jealousy, Doudouce, like Placide Santien in “A No Account Creole,” “held Mentine’s happiness above his own” (228).

In time, however, Doudouce heard that Mentine was “suffering” (228) and sadly changed, and he visited her to see for himself. He found her as changed as Will found Agnes: Mentine’s “figure . . . was sadly misshapen. She was brown, with skin like parchment, and piteously thin. There were lines, some deep as if old age had cut them, about the eyes and mouth” (228).

Feeling helpless, Doudouce realized after lunch that “there was nothing for [him] but to take his leave when Jules did” (231). As he walked away, “tears were blinding him” (231):

He found that he loved her still . . . he loved her now as he never had. . . .
He would have liked to thrust that man aside, and gather up her and her
children, and hold them and keep them as long as life lasted. (231)

Unlike Will, however, Doudouce does not act. When he turns to look back at Mentine,
“her face was turned away from him. She was gazing after her husband, who went in
the direction of the field” (231). In Chopin’s response to Garland’s theme, a critical
difference is that, presumably, Mentine still loves her husband.

Chopin’s decision thus to end her story is consistent with her sense that, “one
can never resolve to love this man, or this woman or child, and then carry out the
resolution unless one feels irresistibly drawn by an indefinable current of magnetism”
(*Private Papers* 217). Chopin cannot say why Mentine loves Jules, nor why Doudouce
still loves Mentine, but since the experience of love is beyond our choosing, it “allows
of no analyzation and no vivisection” (217). Since love to Chopin is innate, it can
neither be analyzed nor understood from an external perspective. This sense of the
motive force of love, a remnant of her youthful literary experience, remains with
Chopin.

A second response to the same plot, “In Sabine,” falls within the narrative of *At
Fault*, after the jilted Grégoire Santien leaves Place-du-Bois and before he arrives in
Texas and is killed in a barroom brawl. During his “circuitous” journey through
Natchitoches and Sabine Parishes, Grégoire is “gratified” to find “a rude log cabin with
a mud chimney at one end” (*Works* 325). Stopping for a night’s rest on the gallery,
Grégoire remembers meeting the sharecropper who lives there, Bud Aiken. He also
remembers his wife, ‘Tite Reine, from the ‘Cadian balls; then she had had a “trim
rounded figure . . . [and a] piquant face with its saucy black coquettish eyes” (326).

Like both Will and Doudouce, Grégoire is shocked to find her much changed: “She was thinner, and her eyes were larger, with an alert, uneasy look in them; . . . Her shoes were in shreds. She uttered only a low, smothered exclamation when she saw Grégoire” (327).

‘Tite Reine reveals that night to Grégoire that Bud Aiken is an abusive husband:

“Bud’s killin’ me. . . . I tell you, he beats me;. . . He would ‘a’ choke’ me to death one day w’en he was drunk, if Unc’ Mort’mer had n’ make ‘im lef go. . . . Oh, don’ leave me yere, Mista Grégoire!” (329-30)

Grégoire helps her escape, giving her his horse and absconding with Bud’s horse. The next morning, waking to an empty cabin,

Aiken uttered a terrific oath. “Saddle up Buckeye.”

“Yas Mas’ Bud, but you see [answered Uncle Mortimer] . . . [Grégoire] done cross de Sabine befo’ sun-up on Buckeye.” (332)

Chopin has followed one of Garland’s most romantic conclusions with two possible, though not less romantic, alternatives. In “A Visit to Avoyelles,” she seems to ask the question, “What if the wife still loves her abusive husband?” As we will see in chapter four, her twist at the end might have come more from Maupassant than from Garland. In the second, “In Sabine,” she affords the beaten wife a means of escape for motives other than her love for the rescuer. Presumably Grégoire has not stopped loving Melicent; his rescue of ‘Tite Reine is purely altruistic.

By offering two alternative resolutions to the same plot, Chopin enters into a dialogue with Garland to suggest that a mistreated wife does have a choice in her own future; she may choose to leave or she may stay and love. Unlike Garland’s Agnes, the female protagonists in both Chopin’s stories act of their own accord, with no prompting

from their potential rescuers. A subtle difference is that Chopin has allowed her females more unsolicited choice than has Garland.

* * * * *

Despite her admiration for Garland, specifically for his sympathetic expression of love in “A Branch Road,” Chopin later faults his discussion of “veritism” in her essay entitled “‘Crumbling Idols’ by Hamlin Garland” (*St. Louis Life*, Oct. 6, 1894):

[Garland] suggests . . . that [the youthful artist] should go direct to those puissant sources, Life and Nature, for inspiration and turn his back upon models furnished by man; in a word, that he should be creative and not imitative. But Mr. Garland undervalues the importance of the past and exaggerates the significance of the present. . . .

[Garland] would even lightly dismiss from the artist’s consideration such primitive passions as love, hate, etc. He declares that in real life people do not talk love. . . . I feel very sorry for Mr. Garland.

(*Works* 693)

Chopin, then, objected to Garland’s statement in *Crumbling Idols* (1893) that “veritism, as I understand it, puts aside all models, even living writers” (*Crumbling Idols* 24) and to his statement that “life is to be depicted, not love-life” (101). Garland’s sense reflects Descartes’s modern notion that starting anew is preferable to returning to the past in imitation. As we saw in chapter one, Descartes’s method of accepting “nothing on trust” was integral to the realists’ “pursuit of truth” (Watt 13). The obverse is romance, an ancient genre that hearkens back to other forms, such as “past history or fable” (Watt 13). Instead of having concern for common experience, romance writers searched for “truths. . . behind the world of appearances, all turning to the symbol as a means of fusing this truth with the physical” (Carter, *Howells* 24). In objecting to Garland’s premise, Chopin is objecting to a fundamental tenet of literary realism. Her sense of the essential constancy of human experience and its forms of expression made

her willing to borrow plots and themes from other writers as she learned her craft from them and responded to their portrayals of human characters and actions. It also made her resistant to the various forms of determinism toward which American literary realists were inclining in her time and which was massively evident in French literature. Although Chopin was considered a local color writer by her contemporaries, she strives to be something more as she opens us to something essential in her characters. What is perennially true in Euphrasie, Mentine, or 'Tite Reine, for instance, would be as true in fifth-century Greece as in nineteenth-century Louisiana. Ironically, by getting inspiration from Garland, Chopin demonstrates the universal nature of "human impulses" that "do not change and can not" (*Works* 693).

* * * * *

Chopin's primary literary dialogue with an American realist occurs with her first novel, *At Fault* (1890), a reconsideration of Howells's *A Modern Instance* (1882). Similarities in theme and plot indicate that *At Fault* is a conscious response to *A Modern Instance*. Everett Carter explains that *A Modern Instance* is "the first complete treatment of a broken home in serious American fiction" (*Howells* 146), while Seyersted notes that *At Fault* is "one of the first American novels to deal with divorce" (*Chopin* 91).

Toth says that Howells was "Chopin's first literary model. . . . He was not only a powerful magazine editor, but the author of carefully crafted, serious novels about such problems as greed and divorce" (*Unveiling* 122). In the margins of Howells's novels, Chopin wrote "good" and "excellent." Chopin almost certainly read *A Modern Instance* when it first appeared in 1882. Eight years later, she sent Howells, then editor of

Harper's, a copy of her novel with a similar plot. While he commented favorably on her short story "Boulôt and Boulotte" (*Harper's Young People*, 1891), however, he did not comment on the novel (*Unveiling* 118). We can only speculate what impact a favorable response to *At Fault* might have had on Chopin's career.

Events in Howells's life after he wrote *A Modern Instance* might shed light on his failure to respond to *At Fault* as well as on Chopin's later replacement of Howells with Maupassant as her literary model. The first major event was Howells's change from "conservative to radical" after studying the trial of the Haymarket rioters between the summers of 1886 and 1887 (Carter, *Howells* 183). At the time of the Haymarket revolt, socialism and anarchism had become inexorably linked as products of trade unions. Supporting the "anarchists," four of whom were hanged and one of whom committed suicide, Howells wrote to Hamlin Garland:

I did not bring myself to the point of openly befriending those men who were civically murdered in Chicago for their opinions without thinking and feeling much, and my horizons have been indefinitely widened by the process. . . . I am reading and thinking about questions that carry me beyond myself and my miserable literary idolatries of the past. (Jan. 15, 1888, *Life in Letters* I: 407)

Yet his decision to support the "anarchists" was on idealistic moral grounds, so that as he "widened" his "horizons," he also became more rigidly idealistic.

The second major event was the death of Howells's twenty-five-year-old daughter, Winifred, in March of 1889, just eighteen months before Chopin sent him a copy of *At Fault* (Sept 1890). As Edwin Cady explains, Winifred's death was a "turning point" in Howells's career:

Never again would the old, bubbling Howells sparkle among carefree, playful writers. The buoyant confidence with which he had been advancing intellectually would be sapped. . . . Nothing could have

prevented his trying to do his duty to his daughter. Yet his reward was not merely the grief from which he might have recovered but the . . . guilt which time would overlay but not heal. (*Realist* 98)

Unfortunately, doctors with limited technology insisted that Howells and his wife force-feed Winifred since her stomach pains were “psychosomatic.” An autopsy revealed that her symptoms were “all too physiologically real” (*Realist* 98). Stricken with grief and guilt, Mrs. Howells, who had been her husband’s “mentor in feminine psychology” (99), sank into a lifelong invalidism, while Howells’s vision was to darken considerably. Cady explains Howells’s now more tragic vision: “Howells came face to face with mysteries the real relevance of which he would not long before have been disposed to deny. Perhaps he never again came so close to Christianity” (*Realist* 113).

A Hazard of New Fortunes (paper edition Nov. 1889, hard volume Jan. 1890), in early progress at the time of Winifred’s death, introduces a tragic vision of anarchy, greed, and the loss of a child. Shortly after writing that novel, Howells confides to Howard Pyle, whose novel concerning death, *In Tenebras*, Howells praised:

I tell you honestly that for the greater part of the time I believe in nothing; then I am afraid of everything. I do not always feel sure that I shall live again; but when I wake at night the room seems dense with spirits. . . . I have others [dreams] about my daughter, fantastic and hideous, as if to punish me for my disbelief. (Dec. 22, 1889, *Life in Letters* II:9-10)

An outgrowth of Howells’s “fantastic and hideous” dreams followed as Howells tried to work out his own grief and guilt in his next novel, *The Shadow of a Dream* (serially in Harper’s, March-May 1890, volume 1890).

In that novel, Douglas Faulkner is dying of an incurable disease in the “Little Nahant ‘cottage’ where Winifred’s last tortured summer was spent” (Cady, *Realist* 114). His doctor is suggestively, possibly affectionately, named Wingate. The dying

Faulkner becomes delusional after suffering ““a dream that recurs regularly”” (*Shadow* 53) and presages a love affair between his wife, Hermia, and his best friend, Nevil. Long after Faulkner’s death, and after the blameless engagement of Hermia and Nevil, Dr. Wingate discloses the content of Faulkner’s dream in which their marriage ceremony had been simultaneous with Faulkner’s funeral ceremony. Guilt destroys Nevil, who steps to his death from a moving train. Prostrate with grief and guilt, Hermia dies “of a broken heart” (215).

Howells sent Pyle a copy of the book and a letter calling the story “a dream of my own” (Dec. 22, 1889, *Life in Letters* II:10). Howells later answered Pyle’s response to the novel:

I felt that Nevil was the helpless prisoner of his traditions, and yet in his place I do not know how I could have acted differently. At first I meant to have him marry Hermia, but he convinced me, as he wormed it out, that this was not possible. Happy for all if they could die out of their difficulties! But even this is not permitted to many, to most. Perhaps we can only suffer into the truth, and live along, in doubt whether it was worth the suffering. (April 17, 1890, *Life in Letters* II:11).

By admitting that he would not “have acted differently,” Howells indicates that he identifies with Nevil’s sense of being imprisoned by tradition, that is, in this case, custom and convention.

In *A Modern Instance*, written eight years earlier, Howells proscribed a marriage on conventional moral grounds; Ben can never rationalize having “been willing [Bartley] should die” (*Modern* 452). In this later novel, neither can Howells condone the marriage of two people who have had no actual moral failings; though Nevil had not believed himself in love with Hermia before Faulkner’s death, he reasoned to March,

“How do I know—that I was not in love with her then, that I have not always been in love with her through all his life and death? It is such a

subtle, such a fatal thing in its perversion! I have seen it in others; why shouldn't it be in me?" (*Shadow* 203)

The only escape can be, in Howells's words, that the couple "die out of their difficulties."

Although Chopin had "a stamp of sadness" (Lélia qtd in Rankin 35) left from her own tragedies over the past years, she did not burden her characters with the guilt that destroyed Nevil and Hermia. Even though Thérèse and David loved each other before Fanny's death, they are finally able to accept their love and to act on it. Howells would not have been prepared for Chopin's tacit approval of the lovers' marriage after the death of a spouse in *At Fault*, the draft of which he was to receive five months after his letter to Pyle.

* * * * *

Besides being familiar with Howells's novels, Chopin kept up with his extensive criticism, keeping his "books of criticism in her library" (Toth, *Chopin* 191). Almost certainly she was familiar with his *Criticism and Fiction* in volume form and as essays appearing singly in "The Editor's Study," Howells's widely read column in *Harper's* (1886-1892). Nevertheless, Chopin was selective in accepting Howells's principles; for example, as evident in her comment on Garland's *Crumbling Idols*, she disagreed with Howells's insistence that fiction only imitate real life. Howells argues, "artists in general, and poets principally, . . . have been rather imitators of one another than of nature" (*Criticism* 196). He says that "the mass of common men"

have been taught to compare what they see and what they read, not with the things they have observed and known, but with the things that some other artist or writer has done. . . . They are taught to form themselves, not upon life, but upon the masters who became masters only by forming

themselves upon life. The seeds of death are planted in them, and they can produce only the still-born, the academic. (197)

Howells blames the “gaudy hero and heroine . . . for a great deal of harm in the world” (239). He predicts that although

inferior writers will and must continue to imitate [other writers] in their foibles and their errors, no one hereafter will be able to achieve greatness who is false to humanity. . . . No conscientious man can now set about painting an image of life without the perpetual question of the verity of his work. (240-41)

Conversely, Chopin insists that writers must learn from other writers as well as from “life.” In her essay, “The Western Association of Writers” (1894), she critiques that group for ignoring the highest forms of art:

Among these people are to be found an earnestness in the acquirement and dissemination of book-learning, a clinging to past and conventional standards, an almost Creolean sensitiveness to criticism and a singular ignorance of, or disregard for, the value of the highest art forms.

. . . When the Western Association of Writers with their earnestness and purpose and poetic insights shall have developed into students of true life *and true art*, who knows but they may produce a genius such as America has not yet known. (*Works* 691-92, emphasis added)

Unlike both Howells and Garland, and in line with the ancient genre of the romance and with the practice of fiction writers before the rise of the novel in modern centuries, Chopin advocates studying “true art” as well as “true life.” When the novel merges with real life, as Howells and Garland advocate, it becomes character-driven, its plot merely concerning how the characters unfold. Chopin objects to such a catalogue of facts and rejects the notion that such objective realism can portray “true life.”

Such a catalogue of objective details is implicit in Howells’s argument praising “the young writer who attempts to report the phrase and carriage of every-day life, who tries to tell just how he has heard men talk and seen them look” (*Criticism* 197).

Rather, Chopin asserts in her essay, "On Certain Brisk, Bright Days" (Nov. 1899): "I do not believe any writer has ever made a 'portrait' in fiction. A trick, a mannerism, a physical trait or mental characteristic go a very short way towards portraying the complete individual in real life who suggests the individual in the writer's imagination" (*Works* 722). Chopin implies that a more subjective apprehension is necessary to portray the essential individual, who is characterized by yearnings and desires.

As Chopin studies the "true art" of other writers as well as "true life," she borrows plots and themes and responds to those writers. Rejecting objective realism and determinism in her writing, she relies instead on elements of the romance to portray characters subjectively, to afford them some choice, and to regard what is perennially true as valid material for fiction. An examination of *At Fault* as a reconsideration of *A Modern Instance* reveals that Chopin advocates choice as she explores and celebrates love, a distinction setting her apart from Howells, and indeed, from many American realists and naturalists.

* * * * *

In the thoroughgoing determinism of *A Modern Instance*, characters are subject to and act according to whatever social or psychological stimuli move them, one major stimulus being their emotional needs and desires, another being imposed expectations to suppress those desires. In *At Fault*, in which similar concerns are developed from a woman's perspective, Chopin takes up Howells's subplot of Ben Halleck's love for Marcia Hubbard, replacing Ben with her female protagonist, Thérèse. In her novel, she introduces some romance elements and thereby provides her characters a capacity for effective choice.

In *A Modern Instance*, Howells, adhering to a hidden premise of American realism, implies that when we see “reality,” it will conform to a fairly universal sense of how things “ought” to be—that is, to what is “proper” and “normal”—or else we will gain the power to make our selves and circumstances as they “ought” to be. Since Bartley Hubbard is contrary to what he “ought” to be, the reader and several of Howells’s other characters judge him negatively. Howells tends to agree with the negative judgment of Bartley, but his novel fails to support that judgment. Howells is unable to condemn Bartley strictly on moral grounds; rather, in one of Howells’s most deterministic novels, probably more so even than Howells intended, Bartley, like all the other main characters, is determined by causal circumstances beyond his control.

Bartley comes to Equity with the sense that he is a self-made man and controls his destiny. Bartley was an orphan who had been “petted for his beauty and talent, while he was always taught to think of himself as a poor boy, who was winning his way through the world” (27). Revolting against his guardians’ vision for him of “missionary work,” he apprentices himself as a printer to pay his own way through college. He begins his journalistic career in Equity feeling “self-reliant and independent, [and] he knew who to thank for it” (27). At the same time, the “pity and petting” of his childhood have produced a dependent neediness in him, manifest in “a longing for sympathy, which he experienced in any mental or physical discomfort” (23).

Consequently, as George Carrington observes in his book, *The Immense Complex Drama*, Bartley “suffers from the common Howells disease of believing that the world . . . is comprehensible, that he comprehends it, and that he can impose his own view on it” (70), a mistaken view similar to that of Emma Bovary. Yet while

Bartley has the sense that he is making free choices, his actions are determined by both external and internal forces.

Unable to make either his career or his marriage conform to his preconceptions, Bartley time and again reacts impetuously to circumstances. In a cause-and-effect pattern, his reactions cause repercussions to which he again reacts; when his rationalized half-truths fail, he flings “himself upon the pity of the first he met” (23). His marriage begins merely as a reaction, first to Squire Gaylord’s insistence on an engagement, then to Marcia’s pursuit after her jealous rage has driven him away. Later in the novel, after they are married and have a child, Marcia’s jealousy continues and is directed toward virtually every woman with whom Bartley comes in contact. Warranted or not, her jealousy consistently undermines Bartley’s attempts at reconciliation. Still, he would have returned to Marcia after their last quarrel had his money not been stolen; after he arrives in Cleveland, he realizes,

he could not eat; he had to own to himself that he was beaten, and that he must return, or throw himself into the lake.

. . . He searched his pockets again and again; but his porte-monnaie was in none of them. It had been stolen. . . . Now he could not return; nothing remained for him but the ruin he had chosen. (348)

By adding such an accidental determining factor, Howells has exonerated Bartley from part of the blame. Bartley does not have the choice to return home even though he has decided it is his only hope; according to the narrator, what Bartley has “chosen” instead is “ruin.” Finally, after his “domestic relations” end in divorce, Bartley’s sensationalist journalism ironically exposes “the domestic relations of one of Whited Sepulchre’s leading citizens” (450) with the result that he is shot and killed. His life has been a series of causes and effects that lead to his degeneration and death.

Like Bartley, Marcia's critical actions also are determined by causal circumstances, both external and internal. She tries to make her marriage conform to romantic childhood notions formed when she and her father "spoiled each other as father and daughter are apt to do" (89). As a child, she got positive reinforcement for her jealousy: "If she showed a jealous temperament that must hereafter make her unhappy, for the time being it charmed and flattered her father to have her so fond of him that she could not endure any rivalry in his affection" (89). When she reaches sexual maturity, her jealousy focuses instead on Bartley. Not surprisingly, her reactions to Bartley are often irrationally jealous, impetus provoking his own angry outbursts that always are followed by his "longing for sympathy."

The more Bartley and Marcia try to break this cause-and-effect pattern, the farther their marriage diverges from their very different preconceptions of what it ought to be. Divorce followed by Bartley's untimely death result from Marcia's final jealous rage. With her rigid, idealistic vision of marriage and her undisciplined temperament, Marcia is as implicated in Bartley's downfall as is he in her escalating jealousy. After Bartley's death, she becomes as "dry, cold, and uncommunicative" as her mother had been. "The bitter experiences of her life had wrought their due effect" (449). Like Bartley, she is a victim of upbringing and primitive urges.

Characters in the novel's subplots are as determined as are Bartley and Marcia. Eustace Atherton's advantage is not that he is superior to Bartley, but only that he and his wife, Clara Kingsbury, have come from luckier circumstances than Bartley and Marcia. Never having had to struggle for survival, Atherton strikes us in the final pages as pompous, judgmental, and unequal to the task of moral advisor to Ben. Since his

sense of moral superiority is not due to anything he has achieved by his own effort, he puts us off with his elitist complaint concerning Ben's desire to marry Marcia after Bartley's death: "You know how I hate anything that sins against order, and this whole thing is disorderly" (418); such a marriage, he reasons, would be "a lapse from the ideal" (453). The fact that Atherton's future has been determined so much more happily than has Bartley's, Marcia's, or Ben's undermines the credibility of his judgment. Since his life is as determined as Bartley's, he warrants little credit for its outcome.

Ben Halleck is also determined by circumstances. Crippled by a schoolmate in a childhood accident, he is also crippled emotionally by his family's decision not to send him to Harvard and by his romantic obsession with Marcia ever since he first saw that "charmer in the street of a Down-East town" (206). Not limited by Bartley's financial constraints, Ben nevertheless is determined by social mores and a sense of "*public duty*" (430) rather than by the struggle for survival. Although at first we sympathize with Ben, our sympathy wanes as his obsession with Marcia magnifies his neurotic hatred of Bartley. George M. Spangler, in his essay, "Moral Anxiety in *A Modern Instance*," notes that "the longer he loves Marcia, the more contemptible he finds her husband" (246). Ben's resentment of Bartley festers into an insupportable "melancholy" (283, 301) as his loathing fires his determination to be impassive, which only furthers his loathing.

He was doomed at every meeting to hear [Marcia] glorify a man whom he believed a heartless traitor, to plot with her for the rescue from imaginary captivity of the wretch who had cruelly forsaken her. . . . and in these futile endeavors, made only with the desire of failure, his own reason seemed sometimes to waver. (402)

Finally after Bartley's death, Ben returns to his Calvinistic beliefs and joins a ministry. Yet even that action is determined by external forces:

He freely granted that he had not reasoned back to his old faith; he had fled to it as to a city of refuge. . . . He did not ask if the truth was here or there, any more; he only knew that he could not find it for himself, and he rested in his inherited belief. (450)

Unfortunately, his "refuge" in Calvinism further reduces him to an idealistic incapacity to act. In a letter to Atherton, he says, "'if I have been willing he should die am I not a potential murderer!,'" adding that now he is "bound by the past to perpetual silence" (452). Driven by forces apart from his will, Ben can never rationalize marrying Marcia, even after her divorce and the death of her ex-spouse; the moral implications of wishing Bartley dead have paralyzed him.

Even if Ben could have married Marcia, she would not have been the person he thought he was marrying. Ben romanticizes Marcia even after she becomes "dry, cold and uncommunicative," just as Marcia romanticizes Bartley even after his death. A marriage between Ben and Marcia would have begun with misconceptions as destructive as those of Bartley and Marcia. Perhaps Atherton's most perceptive realization is that Marcia is "passionate, narrow-minded, jealous—she would make him miserable. . . . If it were not pathetic to have him deifying her in this way, it would be laughable" (412).

In *A Modern Instance*, Howells comes close to conceding that at times divorce is inevitable and remarriage is defensible. Yet, after pages of rationalizing by both Ben and Atherton, Howells cannot imagine a happy outcome for either Ben or Marcia nor for their possible marriage even after Bartley's death. In the world of this novel, characters can never successfully escape subjection to the constraints that define them.

Such causal chains of events are characteristic of determinism. Characters thus circumscribed escape culpability because they lack the capacity to make free moral choices—that is, judgments concerning right and wrong—and to act on them. Spangler notes Howells's "failure to make Bartley and his crimes appear as wretched as the narrator, not to mention as yet half a dozen seemingly reliable characters, insists they are" (241). In such determinism, neither the reader nor the narrator can finally condemn Bartley; if Bartley's actions are essentially determined by forces beyond his control, then he cannot be held morally accountable for them. In Howells's idealistic realism, however, neither can we condone behavior that does not fulfill social responsibility and conform to our sense of what is "proper." In *A Modern Instance*, Howells's seemingly unconscious naturalist vision negates the society's "ideal" conception of marriage. Howells wants us to impose a moral judgment on Bartley, but the terms of his story fail to warrant such a judgment.

In *At Fault*, Chopin seems to be responding to two aspects of Howells's *A Modern Instance* that are facets of the same vision: the deterministic vision of the novel as a whole and his portrayal of love in human life and particularly in the subplot concerning Ben and Marcia. Chopin critiques not only the ideal that would condone marriage without love, but also the sense that love is not an essential force in life. In her critique, Chopin seems to counter Howells's quandary over a lapse from the ideal with an ironic hypothetical question: "What if we were to reunite the unhappy couple and sentence them to fulfill marital responsibilities?" Even in this first novel, as she is learning from Howells, she is entering into a dialogue with him and adapting his plot to fit her purposes.

Chopin disagrees with Howells's concept that "reality" will conform to the ideal and rejects his "'soft' Darwinian," or Spencerian, conviction that "man's natural next ascent . . . was to be of new spiritual heights" (Cady, *Realist* 122). Rather, Chopin's belief falls somewhere between Spencer's idea of "an advancing scale of altruism" and Huxley's belief that "evolution might involve retrogression" (Seyersted, *Chopin* 85). She held the "post-Darwinian" belief that "man was basically the same now as when first encountered in history"; characterized by "basic eternal drives," man would never ascend to spiritual perfection (Seyersted 89), since, in Chopin's words, "human impulses do not change and can not" (*Works* 693). Howells's conviction is in line with the Enlightenment notion that human nature is perfectible, essentially by escaping or negating the conditions of historical existence and ordering itself to the "ideals" of reason. The "lapse from the ideal" (453) that Atherton decries hinders such improvement and must be avoided. While Chopin agrees that we can grow as individuals precisely because we can make choices, she rejects the notion that we can change our essential nature, either physically, psychologically, socially, or spiritually.

Chopin concentrates on this distinction in her dialogic engagement with Howells by focusing on the moral dilemma in the subplot of the relation between Ben and Marcia. In her story, however, she replaces Ben with Thérèse Lafirme, locating the center of her concern in a woman's consciousness. By focusing on that subplot, she, like Howells, raises the issue of the moral implications of remarriage after the death of an ex-spouse, but with strikingly different results.

At the beginning of the novel, Thérèse meets David Hosmer when he comes to her Louisiana plantation "with a moneyed offer for the privilege of cutting timber"

(744). They quickly become very close and he professes his love to her. Only then does his sister Melicent reveal to Thérèse that he is divorced. After gaining that knowledge, Thérèse, much like Ben Halleck, wrestles with the implications:

She felt vaguely that in many cases it might be a blessing; conceding that it must not infrequently be a necessity, to be appealed to however only in an extremity beyond which endurance could scarcely hold. With the prejudices of her Catholic education coloring her sentiment, she instinctively shrank when the theme confronted her as one having even a remote reference to her own clean existence. (*Works* 764)

At the same time, Thérèse, appropriately surnamed Lafirme (the firm), believes that she comprehends and “can impose [her] views on [the world]” (Carrington 70). She calls David’s divorce the action ““of a coward”” (*Works* 769) and promotes and arranges his remarriage to Fanny in conformity to her conventional sense of propriety. David’s love for Thérèse prompts him to remarry Fanny and return with her to Place-du-Bois. Conversely, in Howells’s novel, if Marcia had remarried Bartley, it would have been out of her tenacious desire for Bartley.

Although Thérèse errs by demanding David remarry Fanny, her effort as marriage broker might have proved successful were Fanny a different person. Although David agrees to remarry Fanny only because he loves Thérèse, he makes a conscious choice and acts on it. By demonstrating that both Thérèse and David err in their judgment, Chopin implies that since relationships vary, we need to consider individual circumstances rather than extrapolating a particular relationship as representative. The conventional approbation of marriage is not sufficient reason either to stay married or to remarry the original partner. Persons may weigh situations and make conscious choices. In *A Modern Instance*, on the other hand, there is never a moment when Bartley, Marcia, or Ben seem free to make rational decisions. If Bartley had been able

to respond rationally to one of his wife's jealous outbursts and allow it to pass, he might have escaped the consequences of his own impulsive reactions, but he never shows such a capacity.

To illustrate the possibility of choice, Chopin introduces a romance element in the mysterious character of Homeyer, David Hosmer's friend, whom we meet only as his words surface in David's consciousness. With Homeyer, Chopin demonstrates that, lacking observation or description of a single physical characteristic, we can still know a great deal about a character's inner self. Homeyer is so elusive that Thérèse suspects he is only a "mythical apology" for David's "short-comings" (*Works* 746). Homeyer is a foil to Thérèse as David recalls his friend's words concerning his imminent remarriage to Fanny:

And what had Homeyer said of [David's decision to remarry Fanny]? He had railed of course as usual, at the submission of a human destiny to the exacting and ignorant rule of what he termed moral conventionalities. He had startled and angered Hosmer with his denunciation of Thérèse's sophisticated guidance. . . . But if [Fanny] must be redeemed— . . . let the redemption come by different ways than those of sacrifice. (777)

Not surprisingly, Homeyer is justified; the remarriage is as unsuccessful as the remarriage of Bartley and Marcia would have been. On their wedding day, resentment causes "the demon hate" (786) to enter David's heart. Fanny is no more tolerable than she was in their first marriage, perhaps less so after she has been taken from the contentment her life had settled into in St. Louis. In a naturalistic cause-and-effect pattern, her eventual relapse into alcoholism triggers more resentment in David for his sacrifice. Her addiction results in her death, much as Bartley's deceitful journalism resulted in his death.

At the time Chopin wrote *At Fault*, she was not yet a mature enough writer to explore successfully the implications of Thérèse and David's complicity in Fanny's death. David nearly lost his life trying to save his wife, and a year later Thérèse alluded vaguely to implications of their responsibility:

“It commenced, you remember—oh, you know when it must have begun. But do you think, David, that it's right we should find our happiness out of that past of pain and sin and trouble?” (872)

Still, had they not agreed on the remarriage, Fanny would have avoided the tragic result of leaving St. Louis. Had Thérèse and David not erred in judgment, Fanny's tragic death could have been prevented. Nevertheless, by portraying the remarriage as destructive to Fanny as divorce was to Bartley, Chopin has placed before her reader a circumstance in which divorce is preferable to marriage.

After a mourning period, David is as free to marry Thérèse as Ben had been to marry Marcia. But whereas Ben and Marcia cannot act beyond forces that determine them, Thérèse and David, conscious of conventions regarding their union, are neither formed nor delimited by them. Rather, they finally permit themselves to respond to their love. Thérèse, unlike Ben, finds flaws in her previous idealistic vision:

“I have seen myself at fault in following what seemed the only right. . . . I feel as if there were no way to turn for truth. Old supports appear to be giving way beneath me. They were so secure before.” (872)

David reasons that a departure from the conventional might at times be not only justified but necessary:

“The truth in its entirety isn't given to man to know—such knowledge, no doubt, would be beyond human endurance. But we make a step towards it, when we learn that there is rottenness and evil in the world, masquerading as right and morality—when we learn to know the living spirit from the dead letter. . . . Be sure there is a way.” (872)

A significant difference from Howells's plot is that Thérèse has not romanticized David, as Ben had romanticized Marcia; neither has David romanticized Fanny, as Marcia had continued to romanticize Bartley beyond the grave. Rather, David has loved Thérèse all along, and Thérèse has loved him:

Through love they had sought each other, and now the fulfillment of that love had brought more than tenfold its promise to both. It was a royal love, a generous love and a rich one in its revelation. It was a magician that had touched life for them and changed it into glory. In giving them to each other, it was moving them to the fullness of their own capabilities. Much to do in two little months, but what cannot love do?
(873)

Marcia and Ben never experience such mutual love because they are not provided the capacity for such. Rather, they have been determined by environmental and inherited factors along with psychological forces operating on them: the “bitter experiences” of Marcia’s life have left her “as queer as her mother” (449); Ben’s idealistic self-discipline and self-condemnation over having ““waited for [Bartley’s] death”” (452) have rendered him incapable of action. Chopin departs from Howells in allowing Thérèse and David the capacity to experience and acquiesce to love that is not merely infantile or neurotic neediness. In an ending that shares elements with the romance, the two were “made one, as the saying goes, by the good Père Antoine” (873).

Characters in both Howells’s and Chopin’s novels exhibit human shortcomings. But while deterministic circumstances preclude growth and result in degeneration and inaction in *A Modern Instance*, Chopin allows Thérèse to grow to the realization that she has been “at fault” in imposing her judgment and in acting on that realization. The ethical standards of society that Thérèse first holds cloud her judgment both of David

and of the intimacy they share. Once she grows in awareness, she is able to accept both as she finds them.

Chopin affords her characters choices not strictly determined by biological or social forces. While she does not approve of the marriage of Fanny and David, she clearly approves of the marriage of Thérèse and David. Chopin never critiques the institution of marriage *per se*; rather, she believes in relations that properly take the form of marriage, implying that the institution of marriage itself does not necessarily create those relations and critiquing the idea that in no case should people divorce.

Keeping in mind Howells's own darkening vision, we can perhaps better understand his reason for not responding to Chopin when she sent him a copy of *At Fault*. Perhaps because of Howells's failure to respond, however, perhaps, too, because of technical flaws Chopin had not yet overcome, *At Fault* never received wide acclaim. Even so, as a nonjudgmental study of the implications of divorce, characterized by a bold departure from the conventions of the age and by the addition of romance elements, it was an early example of soft naturalism.

Chopin, as we have seen, entered into a dialogue with American realists she admired. She believed that men and women could make choices by which they incurred moral responsibility, and she consistently responded to deterministic naturalism that precluded choice with her own softer naturalism. She rejected the notion of realists that artists must study only "true life," both by studying "true art" herself and by publicly voicing her opinion that artists must do so, contrary to the view held in America by proponents of realism such as Garland and Howells. Consistently getting her inspiration from other writers as well as from the diverse life she observed,

she entered consciously into a community with those writers, following the more European tradition characterized by a finer sense of participating in a larger activity. Possibly also as a reaction to American idealistic determinism, as we will see in the next chapters, she eventually sought models and inspiration more from French than from American realists, finally achieving “the openness of the modern French writers” (Seyersted 90), and thus achieving a unique marriage of French and American realism and naturalism.

Chopin's Dialogic Engagement with Maupassant:
Exploring the Female Consciousness

From "Psyche's Lament"

O, somber sweetness; black-enfolden charms,
Come to me once again!
Leave me not desolate with open arms
That seeking, strive in vain
To clasp a void where warmest Love hath lain.
(Jan. 16, 1891, in *Works* 727)

Chopin's first novel, *At Fault*, launched a prolific writing career. After that novel, however, she abandoned Howells to enter a dialogue with the French masters, beginning with short stories modeled after those of Guy de Maupassant. In her 1896 essay, "Confidences," she explains,

About eight years ago there fell accidentally into my hands a volume of Maupassant's tales. These were new to me. . . . Here was life, not fiction; for where were the plots, the old fashioned mechanism and stage trapping . . . Here was a man who escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way, told us what he saw. When a man does this, he gives us the best that he can; something valuable for it is genuine and spontaneous. He gives us his impressions. . . . –and if ever you are moved to write stories you can do no more than to imitate . . . [missing pages] . (*Works* 700-01)

Barbara Ewell notes that "What Chopin found in Maupassant was what she also admired in the New England writers Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman: a model for expressing 'what [she] saw'" ("Chopin and the Dream" 160). She found in Maupassant also a freedom of expression not evident in American writers.

Although Chopin had discovered Maupassant in 1888, long before writing "Confidences" and before writing *At Fault* in 1890, she had not yet eliminated "the old

fashioned mechanism and stage trapping” in her first novel. Perhaps disappointed in her failure to overcome technical problems of narration in that novel, she began to write short stories, commenting on the transition: “The novel does not seem to me now [to] be my natural form of expression” (Letter to Waitman Barbe Oct. 2, 1894, in *Miscellany* 120). Having “found [her] way to the short story” (letter to J.M. Stoddard, Mar. 31, 1895, in *Miscellany* 123-24), the most successful genre for Maupassant, she continued to write short stories for most of her career.

Chopin wrote exclusively in this genre throughout the 1890's, and like Maupassant she wrote rapidly. “Between 1882 and 1887, inclusive, [Maupassant] had written almost two hundred and fifty [short stories]” (Steegmuller 272). Similarly, in an eight-week period of 1891, Chopin wrote nine stories. Maupassant’s influence even on her early stories is evident. Toth notes that the last story she wrote in 1891, “After the Winter,” about the devastating effects of an unfaithful wife on her husband, “sounds much more like Maupassant than Missouri” (*Unveiling* 132). In that story Chopin explores M’sieur Michel’s madness that has developed for twenty-five years since the Civil War, but she sentimentally allows him recovery after he enters the church on Easter Sunday.

Maupassant’s influence on Chopin became more pronounced after she translated eight of his stories about madness. Margot Sempreora argues that these translations (1894-1895), “The Mad Stories” as Chopin called them, helped her “to enter his being and look out through his eyes” (86). Sempreora explains that

Impersonating madness may have meant linguistic liberation for Maupassant; impersonating Maupassant transported Chopin to unfamiliar, if not forbidden, territory and allowed her a license that was impossible in her writing of local color fiction. [She got from]

“inhabiting” Maupassant . an irreversible sense of the difference between the “master’s” subject position and her own, a sense of difference that seems ultimately to have empowered her own. (Sempreora 86,87).

Unlike Chopin, Maupassant struggled with impending madness. He may have had a genetic predisposition to the *crises nerveuses* and the *grande hystérie* (Steegmuller 77, 78), afflictions his mother struggled with all her life and symptoms of which he often complained to Flaubert, his dearest friend and *maitre*. For example, in 1878, at the age of twenty eight, he wrote Flaubert: “I’m gradually falling into black depression and discouragement and will have a hard time climbing out again” (qtd in Steegmuller 82). Madness for him was a first-hand experience.

With some exceptions, such as “After the Winter” and “At Chênière Caminada,” Chopin does not use madness as a theme; however, Maupassant’s “Mad Stories” were the ones she chose to translate. These stories give us “gleams of De Maupassant’s approaching madness [after which] he began to revel in the strange and terrible” (Artinian, footnote, *Complete Short Stories* 968). As a result, many of the stories give a candid masculine first-person point of view of unconventional behavior and sexual relations, a perspective that revealed to Chopin possibilities in subjectively and candidly exploring sexuality from a female perspective. After Chopin translated these eight stories, her emulation of Maupassant’s characters, themes, and structures became more noticeable, her perception of the female consciousness became more pronounced, and her writing matured.

Richard Fusco, in his study of the structure of Maupassant’s *conte* in *Maupassant and the American Short Story*, offers additional insight into the importance of Chopin’s translations of “The Mad Stories” to her later works:

The demands for proper translation . . . compelled her to examine various Maupassant texts with greater care. . . . The expansive teachings contained in the Maupassant canon clarified her understanding of simple forms and introduced her to more challenging ones. . . . Amid his panorama of forms, she found no literary dogma but a credo by which she could assert truth as she saw it, including the darker depths of human experience, which she sometimes seemed reluctant to tackle explicitly in her early fiction. (144-45)

To better understand intricacies in Chopin's development, we can examine that "panorama of forms" as it appears in Maupassant and later in Chopin.

Maupassant, who like Chopin studied "true art" as well as "true life," also "garnered formulas from many sources" (Fusco 9). For example, he reportedly wrote kindly to an aspiring author whose manuscript he had read: "I don't think one can acquire essential qualities without having well understood and analysed those of others'" (qtd in Ignatus 165). One source who had personal interest for Maupassant during his own growing madness was Poe, with his recurring theme of "dubious sanity" (Fusco 49). Another source, Maupassant's friend Turgenev, "fathered the practice" of "coordinating the beginning and ending . . . around a single phenomenon" (Fusco 9). Both Maupassant and "his admirer Chekhov" mastered the contrast structure (66). Maupassant's "philosophical stance was invariably an extension of Schopenhauer's pessimism," while his "deft use of language was born with his introduction to the clever sparseness of the Flaubert sentence and nurtured by his contact with the sensory realism of Zola" (96). It is possible, too, that for the elaborate frames characteristic of the contrast structure, "he was inspired by the writings of Prosper Mérimée, who on occasion framed short stories using similar principles" (85).

In turn, Maupassant then influenced short story writers on both sides of the Atlantic. Most American writers, however, were limited either to reading Lafcadio

Hearn's translations in *The New Orleans Democrat* if they lived near New Orleans or, more likely if they lived outside of Louisiana, to reading Jonathon Sturges's translations in *The Odd Number* (1889). That popular collection of thirteen translations became a model for American short story writers.

Unfortunately for most American writers, the majority of *contes* in that collection, after which they were to model their own stories, had climactic endings. In "The Necklace" (1884, "La Parure"), for example, Maupassant used the surprise-inversion form, often called the trick ending, a form in which a significant unexpected change occurs at the end. In that story, a diamond necklace borrowed, lost, and replaced at great cost and personal sacrifice becomes the ruin of the Loiseles. Not until the last line, ten years after the incident, do the reader and the Loiseles learn that the "necklace was paste. It was worth at most five hundred francs!" (Sturges 36). The surprise heightens the pathos and irony. Maupassant, however, aware that overusing the surprise-inversion story would result in his readers' anticipating the surprise, used the inversion structure more sparingly than most Americans realized who knew Maupassant only through these few translated stories. Steegmuller comments on Maupassant's "reputation as a specialist in stories . . . with 'trick' endings":

Considering how deeply engrained . . . was the desire to shock, he might be expected to have written numerous such stories: but the fact is that he did not. . . . Of Maupassant's more than two hundred short stories a mere handful have endings that can properly be called trick or shocking. (205)

A few stories in the Sturges collection, such as "A Ghost" (1883, "Apparition") and "The Wreck" (1886, "L'Épave"), have the descending-helical structure characteristic of the neo-gothic stories popular in the 1880s and 1890s. The helical structure is a whirlpool structure Maupassant used in his "supernatural-madman

narratives” (Fusco 49) to portray the ever-deepening mental decay of madness, often resulting in the death of the mad protagonist. The descending-helical begins with hints of the narrator’s madness, and each successive stage leads to that end, the course of the madness often occurring over many years. Maupassant had studied this descending-helical structure in Baudelaire’s translations of Poe, an exemplary helical story being “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

In “The Wreck,” for example, the narrator reveals that his obsession with a young girl has intensified for twenty years since an incident on a capsized ship. Even though the woman is now married and white-haired, he still yearns for the young girl who no longer exists. In “A Ghost,” as in many of Maupassant’s stories of the supernatural, we are not sure whether the narrator is mad or the ghost is real. Only the narrator has had contact with the ghost, and memory of her has haunted him for fifty-six years. In both these stories, the narrator’s descent into madness, much like Maupassant’s own descent, has been in process for many years.

These two structures, the surprise-inversion and the descending-helical, were the ones most imitated in America. For example, *The Odd Number* likely enlightened Ambrose Bierce concerning his own formula for the short story, “an effective marriage of the descending-helical with the surprise-inversion” (Fusco 103). Bierce found in Maupassant “someone who shared his vision of a mocking universe” and its “devastating irony” (103). O. Henry, too, the “guiltiest of those who embraced a principle too tightly” (102), used Maupassant’s stories as the model for his own surprise-inversion stories. O. Henry’s determinism, however, often leads more toward

the sentimental than does Maupassant's, suggesting that both good and bad fortune are causally determined (Fusco 122).

Besides these simple structures, however, Maupassant, as early as "Boule de Suif" (1880), was experimenting with more complex structures than many Americans even today might realize. He discovered

that two or more focal points could coexist within a single work. . . . A key event does not necessarily coincide with a character's moment of insight. A reader may fathom the truth . . . long before a character does. . . . The author's essential thrust depends upon the reader's linking competing impressions by comparing two or more phenomena. (8)

Fusco emphasizes, however, that rather than "meticulous adherence to some formula," Maupassant's conception was "an intuitive pursuit of a principle of reduction—confining . . . but never constraining" (8).

Henry James, who was bilingual and had the advantage both of meeting Maupassant at Flaubert's Sundays (1875-76) and of reading more than the few translated stories, had a wider knowledge of Maupassant's more complex structures. But James had early difficulties reconciling Maupassant's art with what James considered his paucity of morality. Consequently, James discounted Maupassant at first, complaining in a letter to Howells that apart from Flaubert and Turgenev,

there are fifty reasons why I should not become intimate with [members of the Sunday group]. I don't like their wares and they don't like any others. . . . It would have been late in the day to propose among them any discussion of the relation of art to morality, any question as to the degree a novel might or might not concern itself with the teaching of a lesson. . . . The conviction that held them together was the conviction that art and morality are perfectly different things. (qtd in Steegmuller 65)

In 1885, however, James "devoured" *Bel-Ami* "with utmost relish and gratitude. . . . It is as clever—as brilliant—as it is beastly. . . . *En Somme*, *Bel-Ami* strikes me as

the history of a Cad, by a Cad—of genius” (*James’ Letters* 3:91). In March, 1888, he wrote his article “Guy de Maupassant” for the *Fortnightly Review*, in which he praises him as a “wonderfully rare” artist (“Guy” 245). Maupassant’s “instrument” James now appreciates as being “that of the senses, and it is through them alone, or almost alone, that life appeals to him; it is almost alone by their help that he describes it, that he produces brilliant works. . . . They are evidently, in his constitution, extraordinarily alive” (“Guy” 250). In that essay, James coined the often-quoted epithet that was to stick with Maupassant: “a lion in the path,” an “obstacle” that would “not be made light of by those who have really taken the measure of the animal” (“Guy” 254). James also wrote the introduction to the Sturges translations, in which he implored the idealistic American reader “to approach the author as nearly as possible in the supposed spirit of one of his own (one of the author’s own) fellow-countrymen. . . . It is profitless to read him without a certain displacement of tradition” (*Odd* vii).

James appreciated foremost Maupassant’s brevity, in Fusco’s terms, his “principle of reduction” (8). Like Howells, James was more apt to be prolix. He often invoked Maupassant as his muse to aid him in concision: “À la Maupassant must be my constant motto”; “Oh, spirit of Maupassant, come to my aid!” (*Complete Notebooks* 45, 48). Besides aspiring to Maupassant’s brevity, during the 1890s James also experimented with Maupassant’s structures in his own short stories. He employed the descending-helical structure in “the Turn of the Screw” (1898), for example, a novella in which, as in several of Maupassant’s ghost tales, the ghosts might be a result of the imagination or they might be real. Even the name of that story is a metaphorical allusion to the haunted protagonist’s helical descent into hysteria. The same year, he

wrote “The Beast in the Jungle,” another descending-helical story, in which John Marcher is haunted by a foreboding of an abstract unknown, a figurative ‘beast’ that becomes more real the longer he dreads its attack. Despite May Bartram’s efforts to protect him from what she knows is the beast, his discovery of it—that is, of the love he had missed during May’s lifetime—finally becomes the beast that destroys him.

James also experimented with the contrast structure, in “Glasses” (1896) and “Paste” (1899), borrowing in these stories Maupassant’s preference for using one-word titles without modifying adjectives to suggest meaning to the reader. James alluded to Maupassant’s influence in his notebook (June 1895), writing that “Glasses” was “a little tale that Maupassant would have called *Les Lunettes*, though I’m afraid that *The Spectacles* won’t do” (*Notebooks* 125). In “Paste,” James “pays Maupassant more or less conscious tribute by naming one of his characters Mrs. Guy” (Steegmuller 207). “Paste,” Steegmuller quotes James as saying, “was to consist but of the ingenious thought of transposing the terms of . . . *La Parure*” (Steegmuller 206). However, as Steegmuller also notes, “Paste” is a transposition of “*La Parure*” (1894, “The Necklace”) which is itself a transposition of “*Les Bijoux*” (1893, “The False Gems”). Whether or not James realized it, “Paste” resembles that latter story in theme and structure; Maupassant had preceded him in his “ingenious thought.”

The contrast structure, exemplified in these two stories, is similar to the helical structure; however, rather than ending with a change, often with the narrator’s death, the contrast story shifts our attention to consequences of the centrally placed moment of change, often a “missed moment,” so that we might compare parallel situations occurring before and after the change. Having a “pyramidal movement” both toward

and away from the pivotal point, contrast stories elicit different perspectives on similar circumstances (Fusco 65). "In "Glasses," for example, James examines the altered perceptions of the beautiful Flora Saunt's two suitors after her need to wear thick glasses becomes apparent. In "Paste" James examines the perceptions of Arthur and his cousin Charlotte after Arthur's deceased stepmother's *faux* pearls are discovered to be real and a clue to her infidelity. The similarity to M. Lantin's revelation concerning his deceased wife's jewels in "Les Bijoux" is striking. Both stories transpose the theme of "La Parure," in which the gems are discovered to be false.

However, James seems to have preferred Maupassant's more complex sinusoidal structure to the contrast structure, praising particularly his longer texts, probably because they resembled the longer works he excelled at himself. The "sinusoidal" story, so named because it resembles a mathematical sine wave, is similar to the contrast story but with two pivotal incidents instead of one. The result is a "tripartition," with an interlude "suspended between both significant points" (Fusco 84). Often in Maupassant's stories, the interlude "depicts a protagonist's momentary escape from the realities of his existence" (84). The final segment returns the protagonist to the realization that "his euphoria cannot be sustained;" in fact, the protagonist's apprehension of a "grimmer reality" often results (84). Yet while James praised the complex short story, by 1900 he no longer consciously emulated Maupassant. Fusco suggests that his "rhetorical preference made composing the terse Maupassantian *conte* very difficult for him" (214). Certainly the majority of James's stories that emulate Masupassant's themes and structures resemble the novella in length and complexity.

While James had read in the original language and admired Maupassant's more complex structures, Chopin fully explored them, finding in Maupassant a "springboard" to "structural diversity" (Fusco 139). According to Fusco, Chopin "felt [Maupassant's] influence more keenly and perceptively than any other American writer of her day" (101). Fluent in French, she, like James, could appreciate his full canon. The eight stories she translated, having come from six separate volumes, indicate that she must have read all six to arrive at her choices. From her wide reading of Maupassant, Fusco argues, she acquired "a growing freedom to deal with human sexuality, a commitment to encapsulate the human experience, and a preference to eschew conventional plot" (139).

Besides borrowing theme from Maupassant, Chopin, better acquainted with his variety of forms after her translations, also borrowed structure. She experimented with the surprise-inversion structure but, like Maupassant, realized its overuse would defeat her purpose by allowing her reader to anticipate outcomes. She also mastered the descending-helical, the contrast, and the sinusoidal structures even as she avoided Maupassant's pessimism and cynicism. Unlike Maupassant, Chopin always maintained empathy for her characters, though she did retreat decidedly from the sentimentality of some of her early stories. Rather than simple imitation, Fusco notes, Chopin "exploited his example to discover more possibilities for her voice" (140). He concludes: "Unfortunately, when her own work lapsed into relative obscurity for more than sixty years, so disappeared the potential for her clearer reading of Maupassant to have a resounding direct impact upon American letters" (10). Fusco's unprecedented assertion

of Chopin's importance to American letters justifies an examination of both theme and structure in some of her "Maupassant" stories.¹

* * * * *

Chopin's early works were most often examples of the simplest of Maupassant's forms, the anecdotal linear causal chain that seems to have arisen out of his writings for the *Gil Blas*. In *Bayou Folk*, she also used a sprinkling of surprise-inversion and contrast stories. But by 1894, she was experimenting more with the descending-helical and the sinusoidal structures. Fusco agrees with Sempreora that Chopin's translations of "The Mad Stories" (1894-96) "guided the next step in her artistic evolution," adding that those translations enhanced "her capacity to fuse structure with theme" (Fusco 144). Chopin's writing had matured enough by the mid 1890s that she was able to hold a dialogue with Maupassant as she avoided his often-pessimistic outcomes. "Even his use of form is suggestive rather than prescriptive. . . . It remained for Chopin to blaze her own path" (146).

"A Rude Awakening," (1891), the sentimental story of how Lolotte finally succeeds in getting her father, "the lazies' man in Natchitoches pa'ish" (*Works* 137), to begin supporting his family, is an example of the anecdotal linear structure that forms the background in *Bayou Folk*. Fusco notes that these often-sentimental early stories lack Maupassant's attacks on manners and customs, though clearly here Chopin attacks the failure to accept one's responsibility. "In Sabine" (1893), a response to Garland's

¹ See Fusco's detailed discussion to better understand Maupassant's genius at juxtaposing conflicting perspectives and at combining structures. Although Fusco discusses structure in several of Chopin's stories, he rarely compares themes and plots or considers Chopin's variations, with their different emphases and effects, as possible responses to Maupassant. I will examine such similarities in stories Fusco does not discuss, with the exception of "Boule de suif" and *The Awakening*, though I note my divergence from Fusco in both these. Structure is integral to Chopin's stories and thus to a discussion of Maupassant as her model. Within Fusco's framework, I come to entirely different conclusions.

theme that we examined in the previous chapter, is another linear story. In that story, Chopin attacks the abusive husband. ‘Tite Reine, so named for her once “little exacting, imperious ways” (*Works* 326), evokes Maupassant’s similarly named and once “imperious” “La Reine Hortense.” ‘Tite Reine, no longer imperious since her abusive marriage, is rescued in a strictly cause-and-effect progression. Although her cruel husband, Bud Aiken, is surprised at the end, the audience has been prepared for and welcomes ‘Tite Reine’s escape with Grégoire.

In Chopin’s other response to Garland examined in the previous chapter, “A Visit to Avoyelles” (1892), we see the surprise-inversion, as Chopin allows Mentine to remain with an emotionally abusive husband. In this second treatment, the audience but not the husband is surprised that the elopement does not occur. Chopin has effectively inverted conventional mores, eliciting the audience’s sympathetic expectations of the abused wife’s escape. Chopin is aware that an occasional surprise ending can unsettle the reader’s complacency.

Perhaps one of the most useful structures for Chopin’s purposes was the descending-helical structure. She used that structure to “delve more deeply into the private sanctions of the soul, particularly her own” or to explore “her recurrent interest in sexual awakening” (Fusco 159). As I have noted, she did, however, explore madness in at least two descending-helical stories, “After the Winter” and “At Chênrière Caminada” (1893). In the latter, Tonie Bocaze’s obsession with Claire Duvigné becomes increasingly pronounced until he determines to “spr[i]ng with her into the sea” because “she would have to perish in his arms” rather than become the wife of another (*Works* 315). When instead she perishes from a sickness, he regains peace of mind,

reasoning “there is no difference up there; . . . Then she will know who loved her best” (318).

According to Fusco, another descending-helical structure occurs in *The Awakening* (1899), in which Chopin explores Edna’s ever-deepening awareness of both her soul and her sexuality. Like Maupassant, however, Chopin combines structures for her purpose, and *The Awakening* is a marriage of the descending-helical and the sinusoidal structures. The beginning and ending sections of the sinusoidal story take place at Grand Isle. The interlude, in which the helical structure dominates, takes place in New Orleans. According to Fusco, both pivotal points occur when Robert leaves Edna. After his first departure, she leaves Grand Isle and returns to New Orleans. His second departure precipitates her return to Grand Isle. A more accurate division, however, might place the second pivotal moment at Robert’s return to Edna, the first and third sections then being mirror images ending with Robert’s departure. Such a reading would invite the reader to compare the couple’s relationship before and after Edna’s awakening, which occurs during the interlude, both sections followed by Robert’s realization of the futility of his desire for Edna. His first departure precipitates Edna’s spiritual and sexual awakening, the second, her walk into the sea. As in the typical Maupassantian sinusoidal ending, “a grimmer reality reasserts its presence, returning its dispirited victim[s] to an existence made even more difficult to accept” (Fusco 84).

Clearly structure was more important to Maupassant than might be immediately apparent, and Chopin was the American writer who most meticulously emulated even his more complex structures. Maupassant’s themes and structures, altered to Chopin’s

“own voice,” recur in her dialogue with Maupassant. To examine Chopin’s “capacity to fuse structure and theme” (Fusco 144), I will examine first the themes and then the structures of several of Chopin’s stories that are modeled on and responses to stories of Maupassant.

* * * * *

Seyersted notes similar themes in Chopin’s “Regret” (1894) and Maupassant’s “La Reine Hortense”(1883). Both are stories of spinsters with masculine traits who finally express regrets, albeit in very different ways, for never having had children. Seyersted also notes similarities in the endings of the two stories. Reine Hortense, hysterical, and hallucinating that she does indeed have a family, cries,

“I do not wish to die. . . . Who will bring up my children?”
She fell back. It was the end.
The dog, very excited, jumped into the room and skipped about. (*Complete Stories* 847)

Chopin’s Aurelie, in “Regret,” unlike Hortense, does not die at the end. Instead, after the neighbor children she has been minding return home, “she cried like a man, with sobs that seemed to tear her very soul. She did not notice Ponto licking her hand” (*Works* 378). Similarities, even to the two dogs at the end, are too close to be coincidental.

Different approaches in the expositions are also noticeable. Maupassant uses six paragraphs to describe Reine Hortense’s masculine traits. Her nickname, Reine, owes to the fact that “she was large, bony, and imperious” (843). In the sixth paragraph, Maupassant concludes his lengthy description::

She occupied her time with a thousand masculine cares, carpentry, gardening, cutting or sawing wood, repairing her old house, even doing mason’s work when it was necessary. (844)

Chopin is more economical, describing in a short first paragraph Mamzelle

Aurelie's masculine traits:

Mamzelle Aurelie possessed a good strong figure, ruddy cheeks, hair that was changing from brown to gray, and a determined eye. She wore a man's hat about the farm, and an old blue army overcoat when it was cold, and sometimes topboots.

Mamzelle Aurelie had never thought of marrying. (*Works* 375)

Seyersted argues that Maupassant "informs" us that Hortense is "imperious," while

Chopin "only [discreetly] suggests the same thing with Aurelie's 'determined eye'"

(*Chopin* 126). Chopin's characteristic use of brevity and suggestion appears here and in

her other stories. Rather than struggling like James toward Maupassant's concision,

Chopin in this story achieves greater concision than her master.

Besides the comparative brevity of Chopin's story, there are other structural differences. Whereas Chopin ends her story in Mamzelle Aurelie's consciousness after we become aware of the missed moment, Maupassant continues his story, returning to the family that has been impatiently awaiting Reine Hortense's death. M. Cimme, Hortense's brother-in-law, is relieved that, "It did not take so long as I thought it would" (847). Beyond a revelation of what Hortense has missed, Maupassant uses a complex quasi-contrast structure to reveal his larger concerns with the uncaring family. The turning point, falling in the middle of a contrast story, in this case occurs when Hortense begins hallucinating that she has a husband and children:

"Come here, my little Philippe, kiss your mother. You love Mamma, don't you my child? You, Rose, you will watch your little sister while I am out." (845)

This turning point removes the element of surprise from the end as it places various perceptions of the event in relief.

In the quasi-contrast structure, as Fusco explains, Maupassant

divides between characters the parallel experience he wants the reader to compare. Frequently the peripeteia [revelation] that explains the perceptual disparity between figures over a shared experience involves the gulf dividing generations. Thus, Maupassant projects cognitive dissonance by having characters with differing outlooks analyze one aspect of the human dilemma. (79)

In "La Reine Hortense," we witness Hortense's experience of dying as she reveals her "missed moment" of marriage and a family. We also witness the effect of her dying on the young maid who sobs, "'She doesn't know me any more. The doctor says it is the end'" (844). We see no tears, however, among Hortense's two sisters and their families, who give us an ironic glimpse of the family Hortense might have missed. Maupassant effectively juxtaposes the characters in a series of paragraphs to highlight the "disparity . . . over a shared experience." M. Cimme exclaims "'Gad! It was time!'" (844). Madame Cimme, looking outside at the flowers and "two pigeons making love," sighs, "'It is unfortunate to have come for such a sad event. It would be so beautiful in the country today'" (846). Hortense's other sister, Madame Columbel, simply sighs, while M. Columbel laments, "'My leg pains me terribly'" (846). Their son Joseph and the dog "played at hide and seek around the three flower beds," while "The dying woman continued to call her children. . . . 'Come Simon, repeat, A, B, C, D'" (846). Madame Columbel considers going in to the dying woman, but Cimme dissuades her: "'We are as well off here'" (846).

As we relate to the various perceptions, we too are implicated in the indifference and selfishness characteristic of the human condition. The pivotal moment reveals to the reader and to Hortense that her choice of a solitary life has had a price. In the

parallel experience after the pivotal moment, the reader sympathizes with Hortense, while the unsympathetic family is oblivious to the poignant revelation.

In “Regret,” Chopin concentrates on the narrower concern of Mamzelle Aurelie’s sadness over what she has missed in her life. As Chopin’s concern is to evoke sympathy for her protagonist rather than to expose an uncaring family, her structure differs from Maupassant’s. Borrowing her title, “Regret,” from another of Maupassant’s stories about a missed moment, Chopin uses the sinusoidal structure, characterized by two pivotal moments separated by an interlude in which Aurelie’s missed experience becomes palpable. The first pivotal moment occurs when Odile delivers her children to Mamzelle Aurelie, imploring, “It’s no question. . . . You jus’ got to keep those youngsters fo’ me till I come back” (*Works* 376). The second occurs when Odile returns for the children and Aurelie returns to the solitary life she has chosen: “How still it was when they were gone!” (378). In the interlude between these pivotal moments, Aurelie’s peaceful life is interrupted by the addition of the four children: “Me, I’d rather manage a dozen plantations than fo’ chil’ren. It’s terrasent! Bonté!” (377).

Although the last scene, Aurelie’s return to her solitude, is a mirror image of the first scene, we are aware now, with Aurelie, that the parallel has also a startling difference. After she has cared for the children, their departure in part three profoundly alters her awareness of her condition. During the interlude, the reader and Aurelie believe that the presence of the children disrupts her life. Not until after the children are gone do we, along with Aurelie, realize that the interlude has been a temporary improvement in her condition. By focusing on the parallel between the first and last

sections, Chopin allows the reader to view Aurelie's consciousness as her loss is revealed by the profoundly different experiences.

As in "Regret," while Chopin often borrows theme and structure from Maupassant, she is concerned with the narrower individual concerns of her female characters. Her narrower concerns are evident also in a comparison of her story, "Lilacs" (1894) and Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" (1880).

Maupassant's first successful *nouvelle*, "Boule de Suif," appeared second after Zola's story in a naturalist collection by six friends entitled *Les Soirées de Médan*. Boule de suif, translated variously as Ball of Fat (Artinian 1), Dumpling (Ignotus 129), Tallow Ball, or Roly-Poly (Stegmuller 106), is a fat little prostitute traveling with nine other passengers to Dieppe and safety during the Prussian occupation.

These six persons formed the foundation of the carriage company, the society side, serene and strong, honest established people who had both religion and principles . . . and . . . two sisters [nuns]. . . One was old and . . . pitted with smallpox. . . The other . . . had a pretty face and a disease of the lungs, which, added to their . . . faith, illumined them, and made them appear like martyrs. . . .

Opposite was Corundet, the democrat, the terror of respectable people.
(*Stories* 6)

In their hurry to escape, they have all forgotten rations except Boule de suif, who shares willingly her well-stocked picnic basket. When the travelers stop for the night, a Prussian officer demands sexual favors of the prostitute if they are to continue their journey. After a two-day delay precipitated by her refusal, the travelers rationalize her patriotic duty to sacrifice her (already tainted) reputation to the cause. After she submits to their demands, however, the travelers, including the nuns, refuse either to share with her the provisions they now have or even to speak to her as they continue

toward Dieppe. “And Boule de suif wept continually, and sometimes a sob, which she was not able to restrain, echoed between the two rows of people in the shadows” (25).

“Boule de Suif” reflects a large treatment of a diverse society. Maupassant is concerned, much as in “La Reine Hortense,” with the hypocrisy of a bourgeois society that he, like Flaubert, finds repulsive. He invites us to sympathize with Boule de suif as he places blame on the entire society. In the story, Maupassant uses a sinusoidal structure to expose the self-serving society. Fusco notes that the first pivotal point occurs when the party disembarks in Tostes and the second, “a mirror image,” when they re-embark. The first and third sections, occurring in the carriage, invite the reader to compare parallel circumstances through perceptions altered during the interlude. The interlude occurs while the travelers are prisoners until Boule de suif complies with the officer’s sexual demands.

In section one, when the prostitute shares her food, she earns the temporary respect of her fellow travellers. In the interlude, she complies with their demands while they treat her with ridicule among themselves. In the final turning point, their hypocrisy is revealed as they refuse to share their food, once again considering her beneath them in dignity, though her generous act has freed them.

The sinusoidal structure of “Boule de suif” hints that even with insight, people cannot overcome their own prejudices. The illusion that a society, even one in microcosm, can improve interrelationships must end . . . for man’s egotism . . . pursues its own expedience rather than the common good. (Fusco 88)

Maupassant uses the sinusoidal structure to portray the greed and hypocrisy of his society as they are concealed in section one and revealed in section three. Fusco neglects to note that Maupassant complicates the structure, placing a contrast structure

within the interlude. The pivotal moment of the contrast structure occurs when Boule de suif finally acquiesces to her fellow passengers' pleas, determining thereby the resolution of the story for them and for herself. The central pivotal point precipitates both the travelers' unsympathetic perception of Boule de suif in the third section and our perception of them as hypocrites.

In "Lilacs," Chopin again seizes not on the large societal concerns of "Boule de Suif," but on the narrower concern of nuns' rigid, intolerant judgment of a woman whom they know well. For her purpose in the story, she also chooses the sinusoidal structure.

Jacqueline Padgett argues that in "Lilacs" Chopin draws on symbols of the Annunciation, familiar to her from her early training, in order to distinguish "the ideal virginal mother from real women and mothers" (Padgett 97). "Lilacs," playing on this difference, ends in alienation of the "real" secular woman. Chopin explains, "I cannot recall what suggested it [the story]" (*Miscellany* 91), but autobiographical references along with "impressions" from Maupassant seem apparent. She adds:

If the story had been written after my visit of last Sunday to the convent, I would not have to seek the impulse far. . . . Liza's face held a peculiar fascination for me as I sat looking into it enframed in its white rushing. . . . I do not know whether she could see that I had loved—lovers who were not divine—and hated and suffered and been glad. . . . [M]y friend . . . said: "Would you not give anything to have her vocation and happy life!" An old man—a plain old man leaning on a cane was walking down the path holding a small child by the hand and a little dog was trotting beside them. "I would rather be that dog" I answered her. . . . I did not take the trouble to explain that this was a little picture of life and that what we had left was a phantasmagoria. (1894, *Miscellany* 91-92)

In "Lilacs," like Kate Chopin and Sister Katherine Garesché, another friend of her youth, Sister Agathe and Mme. Adrienne Farival had known each other since Adrienne's school days in the convent. Also like Chopin, Adrienne is a widow. She

leads a secular life all year, until “the scent of the lilac blossoms began to permeate the air” (*Works* 355). Then she would cross the lawn of the convent, “her arms . . . filled with great bunches of lilacs which she gathered along her path” (355). Sister Agathe would run out to meet her: “What embraces, in which the lilacs were crushed between them! What ardent kisses!” (355).

Later, Chopin places their differences in relief against the “immaculately white” walls as they prepare for bed:

Sister Agathe disrobed noiselessly behind her curtains and glided into her bed without having revealed . . . as much as a shadow of herself. Adrienne pattered about the room, shook and folded her clothes with great care . . . as she had been taught to do when a child in the convent. (360)

After a fortnight, Adrienne returns to her secular life in Paris, complete with beaux, a dancing job, and the stage name, Mademoiselle Florine. Sophie, her chambermaid, complains on her return that the “manager” “arrives like a lion. . . . He calls me a liar! . . . He was obliged to inform the public that Mademoiselle was ill.” Additionally, she complains,

“Each day [Monsieur Henri] has come with sad visage and drooping mien, . . . drag[ging] himself, desolée, about the room.” . . .

Adrienne arose with a laugh. . . . “Bring us a bottle of Château Yquem and . . . my box of cigarettes. . . . And Sophie! If Monsieur Henri is still waiting, tell him to come up.” (362)

Through such details, we are made aware of differences between the sacred and the secular woman. “Precisely a year later,” Adrienne returns to the convent for her fortnight stay. This time, however, news of her life has preceded her and her lilacs:

She ascended lightly the stone steps and rang the bell. She could hear the sharp metallic sound reverberate through the halls. . . . [A] lay sister . . . thrust forward . . . a letter, saying in confused tones: “By order of Our Mother Superior.”

. . . The lilacs fell from [Adrienne's] arms. . . . She did not seem to read the few bitter reproachful lines . . . that banished her forever. (365)

Meanwhile, a sympathetic narrator returns to the bed chamber:

In the little white room above the Chapel, a woman knelt beside the bed on which Adrienne had slept. Her face was pressed deep in the pillow in her efforts to smother the sobs that convulsed her frame. It was Sister Agathe. (365)

The Mother Superior, once she learns that Madame Farival has strayed from conventional moral behavior, judges her accordingly. Sister Agathe continues to love her friend regardless, but in the confines of the convent Agathe's love for her friend is denied overt expression.

Chopin places this altered perception of Adrienne in relief by means of a sinusoidal structure. The first and third sections occur at the convent, where Adrienne brings lilacs yearly. In the first section, she is treated with respect and love. The first pivotal moment occurs when Adrienne, after her usual fortnight stay, returns to Paris. In the interlude, the reader becomes more aware of the profound difference in Adrienne's life compared to the lives of the sisters she loves.

Adrienne awaits expectantly her yearly return to the convent. The second pivotal moment occurs when the scent of lilacs again compels her to visit the convent, a mirror image of her visit to the convent in the first section. Chopin adds to the third section a surprise-inversion in which the reader and Adrienne learn simultaneously that the Mother Superior's discovery of her secular life, occurring implicitly during the interlude, has resulted in her banishment. But unlike *Boule de suif*, Adrienne does not weep alone. Sister Agathe, who loves Adrienne despite her apparent transgressions, weeps along with, though unseen by, Adrienne.

Chopin invites her reader to sympathize with Madame Farival despite her unconventional behavior and with Sister Agathe despite her deferral to her superior's authority. Chopin reacts both to Howells's idealism by not judging Madame Farival's behavior and to Maupassant's pessimistic treatment of an unsympathetic society by the glimmer of hope represented in Sister Agathe's tears. The result is Chopin's softer naturalism in which forces operating in us are deserving of contemplation and in regard to which we retain some choice.

Chopin's "internal" perspective on such forces is evident also in "The Storm" (1898, first published 1969, in *Complete Works*), possibly a variation on Maupassant's "Madame Parisse" (1886). Both stories concern a single episode of extramarital sex. Pamela Gaudé discusses two alternative possible models for "The Storm," Maupassant's "Marroca" and "Moonlight." Marroca, however, in the story of that name, like Calixta of Spanish descent, has a relationship that "becomes a daily affair" (Gaudé 3). After being nearly discovered by her husband, Marroca indicates her willingness to behead him with an ax. In "Moonlight," "Madame Henriette is upset by . . . [her affair], for she tries to rationalize the occurrence" (Gaudé 4). The love-making itself is reduced to three lines spoken by Henriette and revealing her partner's detachment:

"And it happened, I don't know how, I don't know why, in a sort of hallucination.

"As for him, I did not see him again until the morning of his departure.

"He gave me his card!" (614)

Although Chopin's theme seems to correlate more closely to "Madame Parisse," as Gaudé notes, a similar theme "occurs quite commonly in Maupassant" (5).

In fact, playful extramarital sexuality, often accompanied by comic elements and farce, but sometimes by "disgust" (Gaudé 5), provided Maupassant a constant source of subject matter. In "Madame Parisse," Maupassant remains external to his title character, contemplating the "audacious farce" of the seduction objectively from both a physical and temporal distance. Chopin follows his lead but establishes a more subjective perspective of the incident. She avoids using elements of farce or disgust; as Gaudé explains, she remains "open and reveals . . . frankness, . . . lack of sentimentalism, . . . [and] ability to capture with words the feelings which result from a pure physical encounter" (5). Seyersted notes, "Sex is never comic in [her] writings" ("On 'The Storm'" 145). Rather she depicts elation, even light humor, in her nonjudgmental vision of female sexuality. "The frankness about sex" of the French authors was impacting American fiction; with "The Storm," Chopin "not only outdistanced her compatriots, but also went beyond the Frenchmen" ("On 'The Storm'" 147).

Both authors choose the contrast structure; however, unlike Chopin in her bold, subjective exposé, Maupassant chooses a complex, layered structure to distance his narrator from an incident the narrator only alludes to. Such layering, common in Maupassant, is characteristic of the "pyramidal movement" toward the pivotal moment of the contrast structure. In the first layer is a brilliant example of "atmospheric description" (Steegmüller 70) at which Maupassant excels. The narrator describes a magnificent sunset from the shore of Obernon on the Gulf of Nice, concluding his

reverie, “We think, we enjoy, we suffer, we are moved, from various causes, but we love by seeing” (522).

In the next layer, we realize the narrator is not alone. His companion, M. Martini, reads the history of Obernon from a brochure. In one of many allusions to the epics, the narrator calls the port, founded in 340 BCE, “a city of the Odyssey” (522-23). In the third layer, “a tall, dark woman was passing along the road that follows the sea” (523). Martini explains that she is Madame Parisse, who had married “reluctantly” a government employee a year before the war of 1870. “She was then a beautiful young girl, as slender and gay as she has since become stout and sad” (523).

Finally, we reach the pivotal moment of the story of Madame Parisse’s “night of love” (526), the apex of the pyramidal structure. The commander of the battalion occupying Antibes, Jean de Carmelin, was immediately attracted to Madame and spoke intimately to her whenever possible during the two weeks after they met. When her husband traveled overnight to Marseilles, the two planned a meeting. Learning that M. Parisse was to return earlier than expected, M. de Carmelin ordered his battalion to forbid anyone entry to the town for the night. The lovers consummated their affair, and the husband was allowed to return in the morning. The townspeople did not guess the truth until the battalion was sent far away and M. de Carmelin was severely punished.

We return to the narrator, who wonders whether now, years later, after an evening of drinking, Carmelin ever relates “that audacious farce, so comic and so tender” (526), and concludes that the “lover of that deserted woman” must have been “valiant, bold, beautiful, strong as Achilles and more cunning than Ulysses” (526).

Maupassant's ironic placement of "that one night of love" on a plane of importance with the epic heroes, alluding to Carmelin, for example, as "The Homer who will sing of this Helen" (526), lends his story a mock-heroic masculine perspective. Maupassant's complex layering is also ironic as it removes us from the action of the affair and distances us from Madame Parisse's consciousness. We are invited through the male perspectives of M. Martini and the narrator to contemplate Carmelin's consciousness. The narrator conveys a genuine admiration for "the bold man who had dared, for a kiss from her, to compromise his future" (526). Although Carmelin paid a great price for his one night of love, he anticipated paying it, and the sense of these two men is that he probably has few regrets over the cost.

We are not invited, however, to contemplate what the incident has meant to Madame Parisse. We know that, for some reason other than love, she has married a man beneath herself, but the only indication of her desire for Carmelin appears in the note of assent she sends him: "'This evening, ten o'clock'" (524). She too has been willing to pay a price, but as she now approaches the end of her time of loveliness we are only briefly invited to contemplate "that poor, saddened woman who must think always of that one night of love" (526). Maupassant has chosen a layered pyramidal contrast structure to distance us from that night and to contemplate the distance through a male consciousness. Such distancing invites the reader to contemplate the effects of a remote event on the lives of the participants.

Chopin may have modeled "The Storm" after "Madame Parisse," certainly after a Maupassantian *conte*. Bernard Koloski calls the story "America's first great

twentieth-century short story,” while “At the “Cadian Ball,” its precursor, is “a strong nineteenth-century story” (*Short Fiction* 77), adding that

The remarkable description of Calixta and Alcée making love emerges from Chopin’s personal experience and her love of Walt Whitman—and from her intimate familiarity with the language of Maupassant and Zola, the music of Chopin and Hérold, and the fabric of daily life in France and the Creole regions of Louisiana. (76-77)

In this, her most daring story, Chopin gives a startling subjective portrayal of unguilty sexuality.

Chopin also chooses the contrast structure; unlike Maupassant’s elaborate frame that distances us from a past action, however, Chopin chooses a simple frame portraying action as it occurs and inviting her reader to experience emotions along with her characters. Chopin begins *in medias res* as Bobinôt, Calixta’s husband, and Bibi, their son, decide to wait out the storm at Friedheimer’s Store. Though “The Storm” stands well alone, it should be read as the sequel to “The ‘Cadian Ball.” Its exposition begins in that story, before the marriages of Bobinôt to Calixta and Alcée to Clarisse. At the ball, Alcée and Calixta, speaking intimately on the gallery, allude to a meeting a year earlier in Assumption. ““Because you were in Assumption and I happened to go to Assumption, they must have had it that we went together. But it was nice—*hein*, Calixta?— in Assumption?”” (*Works* 224).

When Alcée and Calixta meet five years later in “The Storm,” now married to Clarisse and Bobinôt respectively, their desire returns with their memory. This later allusion to Assumption is more graphic. A passionate kiss reminds Alcée: ““Do you remember—in Assumption, Calixta?” he asked in a low voice broken by passion. Oh! She remembered; for in Assumption he had kissed her and kissed and kissed her; until

his senses would well nigh fail” (*Works* 594). But in *Assumption*, Calixta had been “an immaculate dove . . . a passionate creature whose very defenselessness had made her defense” (594), so their passion had not been consummated.

Ironically, now that Calixta has married, she seems more available to Alcée: “her lips seemed in a manner free to be tasted, as well as her round, white throat and her white breasts” (594). The pivotal moment, the sexual encounter of Calixta and Alcée, is a more direct expression of female sexual desire than any in Chopin’s other works, probably more so than in any works published in America until well into the twentieth century. We are as aware of Calixta’s desire as we are of Alcée’s: her “drowsy gleam . . . unconsciously betrayed a sensuous desire” (594); “her breasts . . . gave themselves up in quivering ecstasy. . . . And when he possessed her, they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life’s mystery” (595). Uniquely in her time and place, Chopin sympathetically portrays the sexual passions of her characters, including her female character, with no trace of judgment or condemnation.

After they consummate their mutual desire, Alcée and Calixta simply return to their spouses and homes more contented than before the chance encounter. Bobinôt and Bibi return, carrying a “can of shrimps” to Calixta. A gay dinner follows in which the three laughed “so loud that anyone might have heard them as far away as the Laballière’s” (596). Alcée wrote his wife, visiting in Biloxi, a

loving letter, full of tender solicitude.

. . . As for Clarisse, . . . the first free breath since her marriage seemed to restore the pleasant liberty of her maiden days. Devoted as she was to her husband, . . . she was more than willing to forego [their intimate conjugal life] for a while. . . .

So the storm passed and every one was happy. (596)

Chopin never attempted to publish the story, probably aware that in it she had gone far beyond the conventional morality of her time, especially as she gives Calixta's desire a central place in the story. Both Alcée and Calixta sense that they lost something at the 'Cadian ball. Although both are happily married, they both desire to recover the loss. Yet neither gives us the sense of anticipating a sacrifice for that choice; rather, if they thought the affair might jeopardize the marriage of either, they might not have yielded to their desire. Ironically, the affair seems to have renewed the marriages. At the same time, the marriages that "ought" to proscribe it have made the affair easier to consummate.

In the contrast structure of both "Madame Parisse" and "The Storm," the pivotal moment is the sexual consummation that occurs midway in the story. The central placement of the pivotal moment shifts the reader's focus to consequences of that moment. In "Madame Parisse," the first-person narrator and M. Martini speculate what the past night of love means now to M. Carmelin and to M. Parisse. In "The Storm," the third-person narrator focuses the reader's attention on an ironic contentment in the marriages after the adulterous moment. In both stories, the consequences are contemplated after things have returned to normal, years after in "Madame Parisse" and immediately after in "The Storm." The contrast story, as Fusco explains, "owes its subtlety to the author's digressions upon the consequences of change" (64). Yet as we can see in these two examples, contrast stories can vary widely in scope and focus. With her candid expression of guilt-free sexual intimacy, Chopin heightens the significance of the moment. We never get the sense that Calixta or Alcée will have

future regrets or that Calixta will have the same “poor, saddened” outcome as Madame Parisse.

These various engagements with Maupassant’s themes and structures are a sampling of many we might examine. We could compare, for example, two linear anecdotal stories with mildly surprise-inversion endings, Chopin’s “An Egyptian Cigarette” (1897) and Maupassant’s “Rêves” (1882, “Dreams”), both unconventional accounts by the narrator of the effects of hallucinogens. Maupassant’s doctor/narrator describes his euphoric experiences with ether, then refuses to prescribe it for his companions. Chopin’s narrator even more boldly describes the hallucinogenic experience from a first-person present perspective, tossing out the cigarettes afterwards. Both narrators enjoy the experience, yet neither tacitly condones it.

We could also examine two stories of the same name, Chopin’s “The Blind Man” (1896) and Maupassant’s “L’Aveugle” (1882, “The Blind Man,”); Chopin’s blind man is neglected and emotionally abused, Maupassant’s, brutalized. Chopin hints that the blind man, reduced to selling pencils, is run over by a “monster electric car.” She reveals in a surprise-inversion that the man who was actually struck is not the blind man, but “one of the wealthiest, most useful and most influential men of the town.” The pathetic blind man “stumbl[es] on in the sun, trailing his foot along the coping,” and oblivious of the accident (*Works* 519). Maupassant is more graphically brutal in his descending helical story of intensifying cruelty; his blind man’s body is not discovered until spring thaw and after crows have “half devoured” it (*Stories* 902). While pathos is gripping in both stories, Chopin resists graphic violence. Still, Maupassant’s influence

is evident in these as in the majority of Chopin's stories, while she consistently maintains a sympathy for her characters that Maupassant often denies his.

Maupassant's experiments with structure in his stories allow him to explore variously the psychological aspects of madness, sexuality, and hypocrisy. As early as 1892, Ferdinand Brunetière, in *Le Roman Naturaliste*, credited Maupassant, more than "other members of the naturalistic school," with demonstrating a rare "depth . . . of psychological insight" (Brunetière 407, in Artinian, *Criticism* 42). His "psychological insight," often brutal in revealing hypocrisy, contributes to the growth of a more psychological naturalism than the strictly objective determinism of Flaubert and Howells.

Chopin borrows themes from Maupassant but alters them to reflect her narrower concerns. She borrows structures that allow her to explore more empathically aspects of her characters' psychological awakening, often but not always feminine, to possibilities not yet explored in American literature. Even more than Maupassant, with her more empathic, contemplative psychological insight and her glimmer of hope symbolized, for instance, by Sister Agathe's tears, Chopin contributed to the growth of a softer, more psychological naturalism.

Chopin's Re-vision of Flaubert: Similarities Illuminate Different Intentions

Life

A day with a splash of sunlight,
 Some mist and a little rain.
 A life with a dash of love-light,
 Some dreams and a touch of pain.
 To love a little and then to die!
 To live a little and never know why!
 (1899, *Works* 734)

Although Chopin, like Maupassant, wrote short stories prolifically for most of her career, she returned to the novel form to write her finest work, *The Awakening* (1899). Again focusing on forces operating on and in the female consciousness, Chopin, now a more mature writer, invites us to awaken with Edna to forces that motivate her. As several critics have noted, *The Awakening* may be a response to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856). In this chapter, I will examine similarities and differences in plots and details, finally focusing on implications of differences. I will save until the final chapter a discussion of how these similarities and differences illustrate the antithetical guiding visions of the authors.

Madame Bovary, "the earliest masterpiece of modern realism, [that] has never been surpassed in the type to which it belongs" (Van Doren ii), serves to define the realist novel. Faulted by his friends Bouilhet and DuCamp for accepting "all the dogmas of romanticism" in *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, Flaubert was advised to "throw it in the fire and never speak of it again" (Spencer 93). In that novel he had

proceeded to conjure up every vision that seemed to him attractive; and the so-called temptation is in fact a cavalcade of all the daydreams which had beguiled his leisure since he first escaped from reality into a world

of fantasy. Women, riches, power are only the more obvious enticements in a catalogue that includes necrophily and sadism.
(Spencer 94)

After a twelve-hour argument with Bouilhet and DuCamp, Flaubert finally conceded “that in the person of Saint Anthony he had succumbed to temptations of his own devising” (Spencer 94). His two friends convinced him that “to persevere in that vein would be fatal” (Spencer 95). Had he not accepted their judgment, Flaubert would surely “have developed one-sidedly and might have become unreadable” (Spencer 94).

Bouilhet mentioned a local doctor named Delamare as an alternative subject that would be “foreign to [Flaubert’s] nature and [afford] no scope for oratorical development” (Spencer 95). Although Flaubert denied that Emma was modeled after a real person (Spencer 95), some critics believe she was modeled after Delphine Couturier who had married the country doctor, Delamare, “had had affairs with a squire and with a notary’s clerk, and had recently killed herself” (Van Doren ii). While details of Emma Bovary clearly originated in Flaubert’s imagination, apparently “Flaubert had borrowed the entire skeleton of the book from [the] notorious case at Ry” (Spencer 130).

Emma Bovary must not, however, be mistaken for a portrait of Delphine Delamare, “for *Bovary* aimed at a far wider generality than the trivial boredom of a doctor’s wife in a small Norman village, and Emma transcended the provincial limitations of Delphine Delamare” (Spencer 130). Rather than a model, the Delamare story was a means for Flaubert to escape the temptation of his own fantasies and to examine the necessity of that escape through Emma’s similar temptations.

Madame Bovary, then, “just as much as *La Tentation*, was a stage in Flaubert’s development” (Spencer 115). He disciplined himself strictly, continually fighting off romantic impulses in an attempt to be “faithful to his new creed “ (Van Doren ii). While his “new creed” was synonymous with objectivity and realism, his protagonist yields, as had he, to romantic impulses.

Flaubert was almost too successful in his achievement of a pure realism, startling editors of the *Revue de Paris*, one of whom was his friend DuCamp. When the novel was finally completed, it appeared in that realist publication, but with alterations that disturbed Flaubert. The editors feared prosecution for publishing realism so pure that it made no attempt to disguise or censure adultery. Despite the alterations, however, and to no one’s surprise, charges of “offending public morality and religion” soon were leveled against both Flaubert and his publishers (Spencer 126).

With a brilliant defense by Jules Senard, who “stressed the eminence of Flaubert’s family and the earnestness of his character,” *Madame Bovary* itself was censured but its merits recognized. As a result of the scandal, a curious public, “in the space of a few months,” brought *Madame Bovary* a status it might otherwise have taken years to attain (Spencer 129).

While Delphine Couturier Delamare’s story was a starting point for Flaubert, the fictional story of Emma was a starting point for Chopin. Flaubert, from his observation of the real, created a fictional character mimetic of a living woman; Chopin, a student also of “true art,” used her synthesis of Flaubert’s representation of the real to create another fictional character modeled after and springing from Flaubert’s mimesis. From that model, Chopin went on to develop a contemplative woman with a capacity to grow.

Even though Chopin wrote *The Awakening* over forty years after the publication of *Madame Bovary*, and after a limited easing of restraints on artistic expression, it also created a furor. Yet while Flaubert's failure to censure "adultery" (Spencer 126) and subsequent negative reviews of *Madame Bovary* created a "*succès de scandale*" (Steegmuller 94), Chopin's failure to offer "a single note of censure of [Edna's] totally unjustifiable conduct" (*New Orleans Times-Democrat* 18 June 1899 p.15, qtd in Toth 121) and similar negative reviews resulted both in Chopin's feeling "deeply hurt . . . [and] morally suspect" (Seyersted 178) for the remainder of her lifetime and in the virtual disappearance of the novel.

Early responses to *The Awakening*, however, were divided largely by gender. Although Willa Cather perhaps began the reaction against the book with unflattering comments in the *Pittsburgh Leader*, most hostile, even brutal reviews, according to Toth, were by men. In contrast, "women readers wrote Chopin warm letters of praise and invited her to give readings" (Toth, *Chopin* 121). Sue V. Moore wrote, for example, "I am so proud to know 'the artist with the courageous soul that dares and defies'" (undated, *Miscellany* 133). Chopin's friend, Lizzie L., wrote, "I am lonely since I parted from them all [the characters]—I feel as though I had been visiting with some delightful house party—. . . when I suddenly had to leave them all, unexpectedly" (May 10, 1899, *Miscellany* 133). Anna L. Moss wrote, "The unity of the book is another beauty—one not always reached in realistic fiction. Maupassant is of course tremendous in this line but I know of few books with as little that is irrelevant" (June 25, 1899, *Miscellany* 138).

Many women, then, responded to the work not only favorably but enthusiastically. Several men, too, including Lewis B. Ely and R. E. Lee Gibson, praised the book. Nevertheless, *The Awakening*, unlike *Madame Bovary*, was virtually forgotten after the initial furor over its subject matter and moral implications. It was not until 1953, after a French critic and translator, Cyrille Arnavon, recognized *The Awakening* as being a significant work, that Per Seyersted began his extensive research, again placing it in the limelight but now as a complex and important literary work rather than as a moral outrage.

* * * * *

The striking parallels in plot and the initial moral outrage produced by *Madame Bovary* and *the Awakening* have caused critics to compare them. The comparisons have generally been cursory, however, and subtle but significant allusions have gone unnoticed. Possibly the first critic to compare the two novels was Willa Cather. In her criticism in the *Pittsburgh Leader* (8 July, 1899), she was unsympathetic to both works:

A Creole Bovary is this little novel of Miss Chopin's. Not that the heroine is a Creole exactly, or that Miss Chopin is a Flaubert—save the mark!—but the theme is similar to that which occupied Flaubert. . . . I shall not attempt to say why Miss Chopin has devoted so exquisite and sensitive, well-governed a style to so trite and sordid a theme. (qtd. in Pitavy-Souques 477)

Half a century later, in *Histoire Littéraire des États Unis*, Cyrille Arnavon again called attention to the novel's similarity to *Madame Bovary*.

Kate Chopin (1851-1904) aussi savait le français et traduit Maupassant. . . . Son roman, *The Awakening* (1899), est l'histoire d'une bovary de la Nouvelle-Orléans, dont l'audace relative souleva des tempêtes. Ce portrait de femme, intense and trouble, est supérieur à la plupart de ceux que nous devons à l'école de la "couleur local". (235)

Kate Chopin also knew French and translated Maupassant. . . . Her novel, *The Awakening*, is the story of a Bovary of New Orleans, whose audacity raises tempests. This portrait of a woman, intense and troubled, is superior to most of those that we attribute to the school of local color.¹

His interest piqued by Arnavon's attention, Per Seyersted began investigating *The Awakening* and Kate Chopin. Himself comparing Chopin's novel to *Madame Bovary*, he says:

similarities might justify us in calling *The Awakening* an American *Madame Bovary*. Mrs. Chopin did not use the French classic as a model, however, but only as a point of departure, giving the story an entirely new emphasis. Flaubert paints the manners and the mediocrity of bourgeois life. A major part of Emma's motive power stems from her belief that the fortunate ones—the elite, the Parisians—lead charmed lives, and, to a large degree, she stands for both sexes in her self-dramatization and her frenetic attempts to escape her dull environment. Edna, meanwhile, is socially secure and satisfied with her upper middle class position, and she even has certain means of her own. . . . Kate Chopin could focus very sharply on the truly fundamental problem of what it means to be a woman, particularly in a patriarchy. . . . it is possible to see *The Awakening* as a woman's reply to a man's *Madame Bovary*. (Seyersted 138)

Thanks in large measure to Seyersted, *The Awakening* has entered the canon of significant works, and other critics have followed his lead in comparing it with *Madame Bovary*.

Reiko Yonogi has done a comparative study of the two novels in which she asserts that both Emma and Edna find married life circumscribed. Meeting a man by chance leads to each woman's awareness of the physical aspect of love. Yonogi, like Susan Rosowski, calls the novels female *bildungsromans*, with the "education" of the women beginning after marriage and ending in a self-destructive act. Yonogi suggests that both the awakenings and the problems begin after a conjugal experience.

¹ Translations are my own.

Yonogi, however, overlooks some basic if subtle differences between *Madame Bovary* and *The Awakening*. For example, she claims that both heroines “struggle for self-realization” (iv), that in both works, “one can detect both Romanticism in realistically portrayed situations and reality presented in Romantic terms” (5), and that “since each of these female characters comes to some kind of awakening, we can say that Emma is awakened to romantic love and sensuality, while to Edna the awakening, though sexual, does not stop there” (12). Yonogi further claims that both women are lost

when they realize that they cannot have their ideal condition and that they cannot find alternatives. . . . This we see in Edna’s realization: “Today it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me. . . . The day would come when he [Robert], too . . . would melt out of her existence.” The real is de-romanticized; disillusion is the outcome. (10-11)

My examination of the two novels, however, will reveal wide variance in the two authors’ use of romance and realism as well as differences in the protagonists’ motives. We never get the sense that Emma grows in self-awareness, nor do we get the sense that Edna’s “ideal condition” is related entirely to one or another of her relationships with men.

Daniele Pitavy-Souques seems to have a better understanding of Edna’s growing awareness in contrast to Emma’s lack of growth. She compares the two protagonists:

La jeune femme aspire à la vie brillante et amoureuse qu’elle lit dans les romans d’Eugene Sue, de Balzac et de George Sand. . . . Devant sa frustration de femme, d’épouse à de petite bourgeoisie, le monde quotidien perd de sa réalité aux profit d’un monde rêve.

. . . À l’inverse, les héroïnes de Chopin élargissent le champ de leur existence. Elles se trompent, parfois s’aveuglent, mais elles n’arretent pas chercher à mieux voir, à établir des distinctions entre erreur et vérité, illusion et réalité. (479)

The young woman [Emma] aspires to the brilliant and amorous life that she reads about in novels by Eugene Sue, Balzac and George Sand. . . . Faced with the frustration of being a woman, a wife, and a member of the middle class, her everyday world loses reality and becomes a dream world.

Conversely, Chopin's heroines widen the picture of their existence. They are misled, sometimes blindly, but they never stop looking for a better view, to establish distinctions between error and truth, illusion and reality.

Pitavy-Souques agrees that Chopin must have been influenced by *Madame Bovary* when she wrote *The Awakening*. Rather than presenting an American or Creole version of the theme of the unfulfilled woman, she says, Chopin takes the viewpoint of emerging feminism. Whereas Emma's suicide is the classic punishment for the adulteress, Edna's suicide manifests a desire to unite with the sea in its representation of a seventeenth-century convent, at once somber and a sorority (486).

Edna, in her awakening, has a wider vision than does Emma. It is doubtful, however, and certainly never indicated, that a seventeenth-century convent had a place in her awareness as she walked into the sea.

Susan J. Rosowski notices the difference in narrative perspective in the novels:

Flaubert maintains ironic distance from his protagonist: the reader more often observes than participates in Emma's awakening. . . . Kate Chopin combines elements from *Madame Bovary* with a significant shift in focus. The ironic distance . . . is replaced with a high degree of narrative sympathy. (316)

I depart, however, from Rosowski's definition of *Madame Bovary* as "a prototype of the novel of awakening" (314). According to Rosowski, Emma's awakening to the impossibility of marriage is followed by her "return to separation" (314). Yet Emma never awakens to the impossibility of her romantic yearnings. If the novel had

continued uninterrupted by Emma's death, her reactions to stimuli would have remained consistent and unenlightened.

As in these readings by Seyersted, Yonogi, Pitavy-Souques, and Rosowski, the novels' close similarity in plot is assumed by critics and alluded to often.² Both protagonists are trapped in one-sided marriages, both become disillusioned, and, though rarely noted, both symbolically dissolve their marriages. Both husbands fail to recognize or to respond to their wives' needs: both misinterpret their wives' misery, and neither is capable of effecting any solution to what he perceives as the problem.

At the same time, however, differing purposes of the two authors result in and are manifest in basic differences between their protagonists. Emma experiences no awakening, retains to the end her erroneous "romantic" conceptions, and continues to make the same mistakes and suffer the same consequences repeatedly. Emma's lack of growth is essential if Flaubert is to examine the consequences of the futile romantic vision. From the narrator's external perspective, we are aware of Emma's motives in a way that Emma herself is unaware. Edna, on the other hand, awakens to the realization that what she wants to escape are temporal limitations of the flesh. As heir to the realism of Flaubert, Chopin makes a plea for the romantic vision and for the necessity of better understanding one's inner reality. Accordingly, we are not told all Edna's motives because neither she nor the narrator nor we can fully comprehend them, but we grow along with Edna and gain an awareness of her inner self as she herself becomes aware. Seyersted contrasts the form of awareness that each character exhibits:

² Other critics usefully compare the novels. Sandra Gilbert says *Madame Bovary* "comments on" a "fantasy" of love while *The Awakening* "becomes a fantasy" of a woman desiring freedom (320). Lisa Gerrard says Edna "deprives herself of any identity" while Emma replaces "one role with another" (121).

“Bovarysme,” as Jules de Galtier defined it, is the urge to imagine oneself to be different from what one is in reality. “Pontellierism,” on the other hand, represents a wish for clarity and a willingness to understand one’s inner and outer reality, besides a desire to dictate one’s own role rather than to step into patterns prescribed by tradition.
(*Chopin* 139)

An example of “Bovarysme” appears as Emma clings to her passion for Léon even as she is losing that passion:

In the letters that Emma wrote him she spoke of flowers, verses, the moon and stars, naïve resources of a waning passion striving to keep itself alive by all external aids. She was constantly promising herself a profound felicity on her next journey. Then she confessed to herself that she felt nothing extraordinary. This disappointment quickly gave way to a new hope, and Emma returned to him more inflamed, more eager than ever. (*Bovary* 309)

An example of “Pontellierism” appears when Edna tries to explain her self to Robert. Edna openly confronts Robert, though mistaken about his motives, and complains that in avoiding her,

“there is some selfish motive, and in sparing yourself you never consider for a moment what I think, or how I feel your neglect and indifference. I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into the habit of expressing myself. It doesn’t matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if you like.” (*Awakening* 104)

Edna asserts her awareness that her behavior is unconventional as she exposes her true feelings and presses Robert to clarify his motives. Rather than attempting to invent a reality, Edna desires to understand and to clarify her own “inner and outer reality.”

* * * * *

Examining similarities, allusions, and differences between the works, we consistently see Edna as a more aware Emma with a capacity and a desire to see and interpret things from a meditative perspective. At the same time, Chopin’s many

allusions to *Madame Bovary* indicate that her departure from Flaubert's portrayal of Emma is deliberate and that she intends a specific, different result that will constitute a response to Flaubert.

For example, even characters' names in the two novels are strikingly similar, indicating a conscious allusion to *Madame Bovary*. Chopin chooses the name Edna, closely proximate to Emma, for her protagonist. Edna's husband, Léonce, calls to mind Emma's first extramarital lover, Léon. In turn, Edna's first lover, Robert, reminds us of Emma's second lover, Rodolphe. Even the two doctors bear the similarly inflected names of Canivet and Mandelet.

Similarities in plot are also striking. Both protagonists are oppressed in their marriages. Both, in desperation, resort to one extramarital relationship sandwiched between two phases of another, interrupted, relationship. Neither woman consummates the first relationship. Léon leaves Emma to go to Paris and Robert leaves Edna to go to Mexico. Léon simply "was weary of loving without any result" (128), while Robert fears his growing attachment to a married woman.

Both protagonists meet rakes of questionable reputation and consummate their relationships, Emma with Rodolphe and Edna with Alcée Arobin. Both Rodolphe and Alcée are less than sincere in their affections. Rodolphe imagined that "it would be tender, charming. Yes; but how get rid of her afterwards?" (143), while "Alcée Arobin's manner was so genuine that it often deceived even himself" (77).

Emma and Edna are later reunited, respectively, with Léon and Robert. Emma finally consummates her relationship with Léon in a long, furiously humorous cab ride

through the streets of Rouen, as the exhausted coachman, “demoralized, and almost weeping,” “lashed his perspiring jades”:

the good folk opened large wonder-stricken eyes at this sight, so extraordinary in the provinces, a cab with blinds drawn, and which appeared thus constantly shut more closely than a tomb, and tossing about like a vessel. (267-68)

Edna’s relationship with Robert, however, remains unconsummated. When she returns from helping Adèle give birth to another child, she plans to “awaken [Robert] with a kiss. She hoped he would be asleep that she might arouse him with her caresses” (110). Instead of Robert, however, she finds a note from him that reads, “I love you. Good-bye—because I love you” (111). Chopin intends an effect antithetical to Flaubert’s humorous portrayal of the reunion and consummation.

After her reunion with Léon, Emma falls wholeheartedly into their sexual relationship, pretending to take piano lessons so she might visit him often in Rouen. Edna, denied a sexual liaison with Robert, grows faint and spends a sleepless night on the sofa after reading his note. The narrator gives the reader only a limited knowledge of the note’s effect on Edna, telling us simply that “she was still awake in the morning, when Celestine unlocked the door and came in to light the fire” (111). In contrast to Robert’s note, we might recall Rodolphe’s lengthy, insincere note to Emma, in which he swears, “I am going to punish myself to exile for all the ill I have done you” (221), and the narrator’s exhaustive explanation of its effect on Emma, beginning with the collapse, during which Emma’s “whole body shivered convulsively” (225), and ending months later. The difference in effect is striking between Chopin’s typical brevity and Flaubert’s “heaping up” of details (Becker 30).

Different implications are also striking in the fact that Edna and Robert never consummate their relationship. Even before Edna returns home she tells Dr. Mandelet,

“The years that are gone seem like dreams—if one might go on sleeping and dreaming—but to wake up and find—oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life.” (110)

If Edna has “wakened,” she is aware that the blissful vision of a sexual relationship with Robert is just another “illusion.” Even as she returns expecting to find Robert, she

remembered Adèle’s voice whispering, “Think of the children. . . .” She meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound—but not to-night. Tomorrow would be time to think of everything. (110)

Had Edna consummated her relationship, then, according to her thoughts previous to the act, tomorrow the reality of being a parent would return. She has just told Dr. Mandelet at Adèle’s house,

“I don’t want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others—but no matter—still, I shouldn’t want to trample upon the little lives.” (110)

Edna’s destiny would not have been different had she found Robert at her home. The consummation would have been futile, for even if she could escape marriage, she could neither escape parenthood nor rationalize her desire to escape it.

Although Edna, unlike Emma, has chosen not to be a “dupe to illusion,” had Robert been there, she would eagerly have deluded herself for one enchanted evening with him. The implication is that tomorrow, when Edna returned to reality, Robert would be abandoned to his own disillusionment. In the reunion between Edna and Robert, Chopin’s allusion to Emma’s and Léon’s mutually delusional liaison stops before consummation for Edna, with different implications: While Emma continues to

delude herself and to demand frequent sexual gratification, Edna is aware of her disillusion but would choose to deny it one final time were that option available to her.

Besides obvious plot similarities, Chopin has borrowed minor details to illuminate her different intentions. A striking if subtle detail is Chopin's echoing of Flaubert's expression, "*Ah! si tu savais!*" Translators of *Madame Bovary* write "Ah! if you knew!" (210, 255, 339), but Flaubert writes in the original text, "*Ah! si tu savais!*" (180, 288, 217, the latter the more formal "*Ah! si vous saviez!*"). Since Chopin would have read *Madame Bovary* in its original version, her emphasis on the expression "*Ah! si tu savais!*" also on three occasions can hardly be coincidental (*Awakening* 43, 62, 97).

Emma first uses the phrase after her argument with Charles's mother. She begs Rodolphe to become, in effect, her courtly lover and to remove her from the grim reality of her existence.

"*Ah! si tu savais!*" she replied.
And she began telling him everything, hurriedly, disjointedly,
exaggerating the facts, inventing many. . . .
. . . "I can bear it no longer! Save me!" (210)

Rodolphe, however, leaves her swooning in mental and physical illness. After a hard winter, Homais convinces Charles to take the convalescing Emma to the Opera in Rouen, where she is coincidentally reunited with Léon and quickly forgets Rodolphe. When the two erstwhile lovers express to each other their undying faithfulness and their suffering during their separation, Emma laments,

"It is wrong of me. I weary you with my eternal complaints."
"No, never, never!"
"*Si vous saviez,*" she went on, raising to the ceiling her beautiful eyes,
in which a tear was trembling, "all that I had dreamed!"
"And I! Oh, I too have suffered!" (255)

Finally, after she and Léon tire of one another, and after Emma's financial extravagance leaves her desperate, she returns to Rodolphe to beg for "three thousand francs" (340), exclaiming, "O Rodolphe! *si tu savais!* . . . I loved you so!" (339).

Emma's sincerity in using the phrase is in question each time. The first time, she exaggerates and invents facts; the second time, she belies that Rodolphe has left her in a swoon and swears that she has loved only Léon; and the third time, she dissembles to beg for money.

The exact phrase evokes our apprehension of Edna's growing attachment to Robert. After Edna and Robert return from the romantic island, *Chênrière Caminada*, she begins singing a new song:

As Edna waited for her husband she sang low a little song that Robert had sung as they crossed the bay. It began with "*Ah! Si tu savais,*" and every verse ended with "*si tu savais.*"

Robert's voice was not pretentious. It was musical and true. The voice, the notes, the whole refrain haunted her memory. (41)

After Robert leaves for Mexico to escape the futility of his desire for a married woman, Edna dabbles in painting in her atelier:

While Edna worked she sometimes sang low the little air, "*Ah! si tu savais!*"

It moved her with recollections. She could hear again the ripple of the water, the flapping sail. She could see the glint of the moon upon the bay, and could feel the soft, gusty beating of the hot south wind. (58)

The song, now a reminder of Robert and of her romantic vision, haunts her again at her dinner party, when Victor sings it against her will:

Then looking at Edna, he began to sing:

"Ah! si tu savais!"

"Stop!" she cried, "don't sing that."

. . . She laid her glass so impetuously and blindly upon the table as to shatter it against a caraffe. The wine spilled over Arobin's legs. . . . Victor

had lost all idea of courtesy, or else he thought his hostess was not in earnest, for he laughed and went on:

"Ah! si tu savais

Ce que tes yeux me disent."

(What your eyes tell me.)

"Oh! you mustn't! you mustn't," exclaimed Edna. (89-90)

The fact that the expression is so significant in Edna's experience suggests that Chopin is responding to Flaubert. Emma uses the phrase as a device to evoke sympathy for her suffering and to manipulate her lovers. For Edna, the expression recalls her romantic vision of Robert and their shared sense of intimacy on the island. She insists on their private ownership of the phrase, denying Victor the right to her memories. For Edna, the expression is less one of outward dissimulation and more one of private, romantic recollections that become increasingly intense and change from pleasurable to painful. The growing intensity of the recollections posits a subtle difference in Chopin's conception of Edna's self-awareness in contrast to Emma's lack of self-awareness. Although both protagonists have a romantic vision, Edna's more internal, private associations with the phrase play against Emma's more self-aggrandizing behavior. We are presented with similar experiences from opposing narrative positions: we see Emma's use of the phrase from an external perspective as her own construction to conceal her internal reality; we see Edna's use of the phrase as a window to an internal apprehension, as our awareness of Edna grows along with her own self-awareness.

Another detail Chopin borrows from *Madame Bovary* is the cigar case. Charles and Emma are invited to a formal ball by the Marquis, who, after Charles had cured him of an abscess,

saw Emma; thought she had a pretty figure, and that she did not bow like a peasant; so that he did not think he was going beyond the bounds of condescension, nor, on the other hand, making a mistake, in inviting the young couple. (50)

Emma is transported to the world of her dreams at the ball, as “in the refulgence of the present hour her past life, so distinct until then, faded away completely, and she almost doubted having lived it” (56). Soon enough the occasion comes to an end, but as the couple leaves, “Charles, giving a last look to the harness, saw something on the ground between his horse’s legs, and he picked up a cigar case with a green silk border and emblazoned in the center like the door of a carriage” (60).

Emma later seizes the cigar case, throwing it “quickly to the back of the cupboard” (60) where she can keep it as a memento of the moment of fulfillment.

Often when Charles was out she took from the cupboard, between the folds of the linen where she left it, the green silk cigar case. She looked at it, opened it and even smelled the odor of the lining—a mixture of verbena and tobacco. Whose was it? The Viscount’s? Perhaps it was a present from his mistress. It had been embroidered on some rosewood frame, a pretty little thing, hidden from all eyes, that had occupied many hours, and over which had fallen the soft curls of the pensive worker. A breath of love had passed over the stitches on the canvas; each prick of the needle had fixed there a hope or a memory, and all those interwoven threads of silk were but the continuity of the same silent passion. (62)

Chopin introduces a similar pouch, similarly crafted, into her novel. When Robert returns from Mexico, he and Edna have dinner at her “pigeon house.” During their conversation, Edna notices the pouch:

“I have forgotten nothing at Grand Isle,” he said, not looking at her, but rolling a cigarette. His tobacco pouch, which he laid upon the table, was a fantastic embroidered silk affair, evidently the handiwork of a woman.

“You used to carry your tobacco in a rubber pouch,” said Edna, picking up the pouch and examining the needlework.

“Yes; it was lost.”

“Where did you buy this one? In Mexico?”

“It was given to me by a Vera Cruz girl; they are very generous.”
(100)

Again we see a subtle difference in Chopin’s use of this minor detail. For Emma, the embroidered cigar case becomes a masculine memento of a noble man, evoking the world she desires and now has had contact with. The memento represents for her the possibility of a return to that world of whose existence it bears silent testimony. In an attempt to replicate that world, she gives Rodolphe, along with other extravagances,

finally, a cigar case exactly like the viscount’s. . . . These presents, however, humiliated him; he refused several; she insisted, and he ended by obeying, thinking her tyrannical and over-exacting. (206-07)

From the narrator’s perspective of Emma, the cigar cases only allow the reader to mark the distance between the world of her illusions and the world she inhabits.

For Edna, however, the embroidered tobacco pouch evokes a vision of a real woman who has painstakingly embroidered the pouch for Robert. The pouch, rather than evoking for her an illusory romantic vision similar to Emma’s, signifies an unknown reality over which Edna has no control. She is curious about the girl from Vera Cruz, asking,

“What was she like—the one who gave you the pouch? . . .
“Did you visit at her house? Was it interesting? I should like to know and hear about the people you met, and the impressions they made on you.”
(100)

Alcée enters and, joining their conversation, describes his own trip to Mexico and his experience with girls from Vera Cruz. Edna reveals some jealousy of the unknown girl when she asks Alcée,

“Did they embroider slippers and tobacco pouches and hat-bands and things for you? . . .

“Oh! my! no! I didn’t get so deep in their regard. . .”
“You were less fortunate than Robert, then.” (100)

For Edna the pouch, rather than being a magic object with which to re-create, or create, a romantic vision, becomes a window to her inner reality, making Edna and the reader more conscious of her feelings for Robert and her jealousy regarding his female acquaintance. Later that night, “a vision—a transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl arose before her. She writhed with a jealous pang” (101).

Had Emma been placed in an exactly parallel situation with Léon, she might have allowed her jealousy and rage to further alienate her from him. Flaubert’s narrator, less sympathetic toward his character than Chopin’s narrator, would have revealed from an external perspective details of Emma’s romantic concerns and motives. While Chopin has alluded to *Madame Bovary*, she has consciously used an altered situation to allow us a more internal awareness of Edna even as Edna is becoming more aware of her own deeper passions and motives.

* * * * *

Together with these parallels in minor details, an examination of the larger implications of motives reveals parallels in Emma’s and Edna’s motivations for marriage and in the subsequent disillusionment and lack of passion they experience in their marriages.

Neither Emma nor Edna marries for love, and for both, their lovers take precedence over their husbands. Charles and Léonce are both victims of wives who would have preferred to marry their fantasies, yet both victimize their wives by their own conventional expectations of marriage.

Emma's marriage to Charles is arranged in the style of courtly marriages, albeit with her consent:

Now, as old Rouault would soon be forced to sell twenty-two acres of his property, as he owed a good deal to the mason, to the harnessmaker, and as the shaft of the cider press wanted renewing, "If he asks for her," he said to himself, "I'll give her to him." (26)

While in the convent, Emma has been enamored alternately and rather sporadically first with religion, then with the heroes in romance novels, until

[her] nature, positive in the midst of its enthusiasms, that had loved the church for the sake of the flowers, and music for the words of the songs, and literature for its passional stimulus, rebelled against the mysteries of faith as it grew irritated by discipline, a thing antipathetic to her constitution. (42)

Mercurial and impatient with the order of things, Emma will never submit herself to the discipline required of any possible vocation or mode of life. She feels only disappointment that no actual experience or condition or circumstance corresponds in fullness and intensity to her conception and desire. Accordingly, she comes to believe at an early age that she has "nothing more to learn, and nothing more to feel" (43). Although she enters marriage with the illusion that it will provide its own form of romantic bliss, or at least satisfaction, it is not surprising that marriage fails to provide the continuous intense passion of which she thinks she is capable. She is unsuccessful in her search for that

wondrous passion which, till then, like a great bird with rose-colored wings, hung in the splendor of the skies of poetry, and now she could not think that the calm in which she lived was the happiness she had dreamed. (43)

Disappointment has replaced what she had hoped would be love: “Before marriage she thought herself in love; but the happiness that should have followed this love not having come, she must, she thought, have been mistaken” (37).

Emma’s disillusion with the reality of her marriage returns her to the world of her dreams:

In Eugène Sue she studied descriptions of furniture; she read Balzac and George Sand, seeking in them imaginary satisfaction for her own desires. . . . The memory of the Viscount always returned as she read. (63)

Chopin describes Edna’s similar expectations and disappointments. Believing in fate, Edna “was a grown woman when she was overtaken by what she supposed to be the climax of her fate. It was when the face and figure of a great tragedian began to haunt her imagination and stir her senses” (19). Unfortunately, for Edna, as for Emma, the reality of marriage falls short of her inflated expectations:

Her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him. He fell in love. (19)

Chopin never tells us, however, that Edna “fell in love,” or even that she “thought herself in love” before marriage. Rather, we learn,

He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her. She fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken. . . .

The acme of bliss, which would have been a marriage with the tragedian, was not for her in this world. (19)

Léonce in his “absolute devotion” and Edna in her lack of affection seem to mirror Charles and Emma:

Now [Charles] had for life this beautiful woman whom he adored. For him the universe did not extend beyond the circumference of her petticoat.

. . . He could not keep from constantly touching her comb, her rings, her fichu; . . . and she put him away half smiling, half vexed, as you do a child who hangs about you. (36-37)

Chopin presents Edna's disappointment as similar to Emma's: both have idealized and inaccessible lovers, Emma's, the Viscount and Edna's, the tragedian; both are unfulfilled in the marriages in which they find themselves; both spurn their husband's devotion; and both have husbands who seemingly love them yet who are smugly unaware that something is lacking. Nevertheless, whereas Flaubert emphasizes Emma's unrealistic expectations of marriage from the start, Chopin portrays Edna as simply having lacked self-awareness as she allowed emotions of the moment to steer her.

Emma, who never experiences even a brief satisfaction with her marriage, tries for a time to make her marriage conform to her expectations:

She wanted to make herself in love with [Charles]. By moonlight in the garden she recited all the passionate rhymes she knew by heart, and, sighing, sang to him many melancholy adagios; but she found that she was as calm after this as before. (47)

Emma tries unsuccessfully to invent passion, since nothing less than passion will suffice for her.

In contrast, Edna is able, briefly, to rationalize her disappointment. Early in the marriage,

Edna found herself face to face with the realities. She grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution. (19-20)

Rather than trying to invent passion, Edna, who believes that she can survive without it, fears that it would threaten the stability of her relationship with Léonce. "She felt she

would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams” (19). Unfortunately, Edna’s first summer at Grand Isle threatens the “satisfaction” she gets from her lack of “passion” and “warmth,” as circumstances recall for her such romantic visions as the “acme of bliss, which would have been a marriage with the tragedian” (19). After her “awakening,” she yearns for something—“passion” may or may not be the right word for it—without which she is unwilling to live, something no less unattainable. Unlike Emma’s illusion after marriage, then, Edna’s illusion is that she can live without love or passion or “something” she cannot attain. Her awakening includes her realization that nothing in temporal existence corresponds to that yearning, a profound shock to a modern sensibility trained to believe one can indeed find contentment and satisfy all one’s longings or can bring those longings completely under the control of reason.

Just as the women have different illusions about their marriages, so the husband in each relationship responds differently to his wife. While Léonce’s “absolute devotion” bears examination, Charles remains devoted until the end, his illusions never crumbling until he discovers the love letters Emma had saved:

One day . . . he sat down before [the rosewood desk], turned the key, and pressed the spring. All Léon’s letters were there. There could be no doubt this time. He devoured them to the very last, ransacked every corner, all the furniture, all the drawers, behind the walls, sobbing, crying aloud, distraught, mad. He found a box and broke it open with a kick. Rodolphe’s portrait flew full in his face in the midst of the overturned love letters.

. . . Then they said he shut himself up to drink. (378-379)

Ultimately, the grief from his disillusionment results in his death.

A realist reflection of Charles’s personality, his conversation is described as “commonplace as street pavement” (44). Yet he appears to be the only character who

maintains integrity until his death. Perhaps his greatest flaw is his inability to notice, or correctly to interpret, Emma's dissatisfaction. During her forty-three day bout with grief over Rodolphe, "she suffered in her heart, then in the chest, the head, the limbs; she had vomitings, in which Charles thought he saw the first signs of cancer" (228). Charles misdiagnoses Emma's illness. Yet, even if he had correctly interpreted her dissatisfaction, he would have been powerless to alleviate it, since nothing he could have done would have elevated him to a position equal to Emma's illusion.

In contrast to Charles, Léonce notices Edna's changes in behavior immediately, but he is just as incapable of interpreting them. He claims devotion to Edna and displays at least more tolerance of her "mood" (67) than does her father, who cautions him, "You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce" (71). While Léonce is not capable of understanding his wife's curious behavior or his own contribution to that behavior, he is more aware than Charles, who thinks his wife's behavior impeccable. Léonce's awareness, however, does not help him effect a solution. He turns to Dr. Mandelet for advice:

"I don't want to quarrel or be rude to a woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it, and feel like ten thousand devils after I've made a fool of myself. She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me. . . . She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women." (65)

Léonce neither sympathizes with the concerns he attributes to Edna nor sees how his own behavior contributes to her feelings of dissatisfaction. Still, Léonce is aware that Edna experiences something. Even if he disagrees with her "notions" as he understands them, he can neither discount her experience nor abandon his devotion to her.

Yet Léonce also regards Edna as “a valuable piece of personal property” (4), and “he greatly valued his possessions” (50). His devotion, therefore, rather than being solely for a human companion, is in some part for a woman in the subservient position of being owned and expected to act in a certain manner. Essential to the character of ownership is control, and part of Edna’s need to transcend temporal limitations is to escape control. Consequently, even if Léonce is devoted and is aware of “the eternal rights of women,” he is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to comprehend and respond appropriately to Edna’s need. Since Edna’s ultimate need, however, is to transcend all temporal limitations, no other human did, or could, respond successfully.

Even if Charles could have alleviated Emma’s dissatisfaction, he denies its existence:

“Oh, kiss me, my own!”
“Leave me!” she said, red with anger.
“What is the matter?” he asked, stupefied. “Be calm; compose yourself. You know well enough that I love you. Come!”
“Enough!” she cried with a terrible look.” (201)

While Charles remains external to Emma’s awareness, Léonce tries unsuccessfully to penetrate Edna’s awareness. Yet Léonce never has the access to Edna’s awareness that either the narrator or the reader has. The narrator intervenes to illustrate the perceptual disparity: “He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world” (57). Chopin uses similarities to the Bovarys’ marriage to reveal the difference in perception of both spouses.

Like Flaubert, Chopin allows her protagonist to bring her marriage to a symbolic end, even though the practical bond continues, before consummating an extramarital

relationship. Emma burns her bridal bouquet; Edna throws down and stamps on her wedding ring. When Emma throws her bouquet into the fireplace,

it flared up more quickly than dry straw. Then it was like a red bush in the cinders, slowly devoured. She watched it burn. The little pasteboard berries burst, the wire twisted, the gold lace melted; and the shriveled paper corollas, fluttering like black butterflies at the back of the stove, at last flew up the chimney.

When they left Tostes in the month of March, Madame Bovary was pregnant. (73)

Emma may have ended the marriage for herself symbolically, but clearly the relation lives on in the unborn fetus.

Edna's symbolic dissolution of her marriage also ends in the reality of a relation that lives on:

Once she stopped, and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it. But her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet. (53)

Then, in her desire "to destroy something," Edna throws a vase on the hearth. The maid, hearing the crash, enters and insists on picking up glass that had

scattered upon the carpet. "And here's your ring, ma'am, under the chair."

Edna held out her hand, and taking the ring, slipped it upon her finger. (53)

In these passages, Emma's outburst is countered by her pregnancy, Edna's by the undamaged symbol of marriage returned to her finger. Nevertheless, while each marriage lives on in name and outward form, neither protagonist considers herself bound by the terms and conditions she pledged herself to when she entered the relationship.

After illusions about their marriages are shattered, Emma still seeks passion, while Edna is aware that she can endure without passion in her marriage, though not

without a nameless something else. When loyalty ends with the symbolic termination of the marriages, Emma drifts aimlessly between sexual unions in a futile attempt to find wholeness through another person, whereas Edna begins to awaken to a new awareness. The awareness nascent in Edna's disillusionment becomes a figurative awakening to a deepening self-awareness.

In Chopin's unfolding of *The Awakening* lies the very crux of the differences in the stories. Chopin's original title, "A Solitary Soul," would have been appropriate considering that Edna becomes more solitary in proportion as she awakens. Asked by editors to replace that title, however, Chopin chose a title to reflect the theme of awakening. She invites us to awaken along with Edna in a way we are not invited to grow with Emma. Chopin's sense of "awakening," appearing in both theme and title, differs from Flaubert's sense of awakening.

Emma never has an awakening. When she makes a plea for help to Monsieur Bournisien, the curé, rather than offering her a means to apprehend her illusion, he completely misreads her "pleading eyes" (124) and generalizes her complaints to other members of the community. Unfortunately, he is capable of discussing external hardships but not anguish of the spirit, especially when disguised by the appearance of prosperity.

"Yes," said he, . . . "farmers are much to be pitied."
"Others, too," she replied.
"Assuredly. Town laborers, for example."
"It is not they—"
"Pardon! I've known poor mothers of families, virtuous women
I assure you, real saints, who wanted even bread."
"But those . . . who have bread and have no—"
"Fire in winter," said the priest.

. . . “My God! my God!” she sighed. (124)

Finally attributing her distress to “indigestion,” he suggests,

“drink a little tea, that will strengthen you, or else a glass of fresh water with a little moist sugar.”

“Why?” And she looked like one awakening from a dream. (125)

The curé’s total misdiagnosis of her distress confuses Emma. By telling us she “looked like” someone who awakens, the narrator indicates that her expression instead signifies an antithetical lack of awareness. Emma’s confusion at the curé’s misdiagnosis signifies that they both harbor a misconception.

The curé’s misapprehension contrasts with Dr. Mandelet’s apprehension of Edna’s distress. After Adèle gives birth and Edna is about to return to Robert, she tells Dr. Mandelet,

“Nobody has any right—except the children, perhaps—and even then, it seems to me—or it did seem”—She felt that her speech was voicing the incoherency of her thoughts, and stopped abruptly.

“The trouble is,” sighed the Doctor, grasping her meaning intuitively, “that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. . . . you seem to me to be in trouble. I am not going to ask for your confidence. I will only say that if ever you feel moved to give it to me, perhaps I might help you.”

(109-110)

Dr. Mandelet apprehends Edna’s internal entrapment, whereas Bournisien has remained oblivious to Emma’s need, denying her the hope of alleviating her misery that sympathy and understanding might provide. In a related and curious contrast, Emma seeks understanding but does not find it, whereas Edna is offered the possibility of understanding but does not avail herself of it.

Later, the curé attempts to ease Emma’s final suffering as he administers the sacrament and admonishes her to “blend her sufferings with those of Jesus Christ and

abandon herself to the divine mercy” (354). The narrator again tells us, exactly as in the earlier scene with the curé, that she resembled someone “awakening from a dream” (355). This time Bournisien is willing to offer the understanding Emma had sought in the earlier scene, but, ironically, it is too late for him to offer anything but a final sacrament. At last becoming serene,

she looked around her slowly, as one awakening from a dream; then in a distinct voice she asked for her looking-glass, and remained some time bending over it, until the big tears fell from her eyes. (355)

We are aware that the term “awakening” is a misnomer, as Emma’s final romantic vision, perhaps of being beautiful in death, perhaps of this and more, or perhaps of something else, has failed her. The mirror reveals only the reality of a dying face. Curiously, Flaubert neglects to tell us explicitly, in perhaps his only reticence in the novel, what Emma’s sense and motives are when she sees her dying face. While we never have the sense that Emma has awakened to the deeper forces which have moved her, we realize that she might finally have gained some perspective on her own romantic illusion, though, ironically, it is again too late.

Chopin borrows the phrase, “awakening from a dream,” from Flaubert, but allows it to signify an actual awakening to awareness. On the first evening that Edna refuses her husband’s command to come to bed, she “began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, a delicious, grotesque, impossible dream, to feel again the realities pressing into her soul” (32). Edna experiences a clash with reality similar to Emma’s, but she is aware immediately of the “impossibility” of her dream, and she begins to grow in awareness. Her awakening here signifies her new commitment to herself.

Edna's awakening is not painless. When Robert leaves for Mexico, Edna strives "to hold back and to hide, even from herself, . . . the emotion which was troubling—tearing—her." She "recognized anew the symptoms of infatuation" and became aware "that she had lost that which she had held, . . . that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded" (46). This yearning for what her "awakened being demanded" creates Edna's profound dilemma.

Edna's awareness grows again in the form of "awakening sensuousness" with Alcée Arobin (76), which causes her to feel

somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance without being wholly awakened from its glamour. . . . "What would he think?"

She did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse. (77)

Her awakening to sensual desire maintains the "glamour" of infidelity while it reveals the significance to her of her infidelity to Robert by differentiating in force from her less remorseful feelings for her infidelity to Léonce. She awakens to a loveless marriage and to a relationship of love without marriage, to both of which she has been unfaithful.

Like Emma, Edna has fallen victim to "the higher law of . . . courtly loyalty . . . opposed to the satisfaction of love as much as to marriage" (Rougemont 34). For Edna, just as for Emma or the courtly lover, love and satisfaction become incompatible with marriage, while even love outside of marriage, once it becomes a reality, "*is no longer love*" (Rougement 34). The difference is that Edna, unlike Emma, becomes aware that no relationship can satisfy her with any permanence. She thinks, "It makes no difference to me" whether it is Léonce, Alcée, or Robert. Eventually the thought of all

of them “would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone” (113). The consummation of a relationship with Robert would remove the barrier that sustains her desire for him so that the experience of desire could no longer be maintained.

Once Edna is conscious of her intense desire, she becomes unwilling to give it up, even though she becomes aware of the impossibility of satisfying it. While her yearning does not correspond with anything or any person, the fact does not lessen the force of love in her life. Chopin’s original title, “A Solitary Soul,” recognized that Edna’s awakening leaves her aware that no one and nothing can satisfy her, and she will accept or even tolerate nothing less. Thus isolated from any satisfying human relation, she remains “a solitary soul” until the end.

The physical consummation of her relation with Alcée has caused Edna to feel “as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to look upon and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality” (83). This beautiful and brutal “monster” is a force Edna must reckon with, a force that emerges in Chopin’s soft naturalism. Edna awakens to this force, with the implication that she is at least partially aware of what she is in the midst of and subject to.

Later, when Robert returns, she sees again in his eyes, but now “with an added warmth and entreaty which had not been there before—the same glance which had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them” (97). Awakening, to Edna, signifies many things: a growing delight in the sensuousness of her existence, a growing awareness of the implications of infidelity and of the “beauty and brutality” inherent in life, and a growing realization that life as she has

known it or even can imagine it will not be able to satisfy the newly awakened “places of her soul.” From the narrator’s internal perspective, we are invited to experience Edna’s awakening even as Edna herself “awakens.”

Edna’s realization that her life cannot satisfy her, that no possible life she can imagine could satisfy her, is a realization Emma never experiences. Rather, “awakening” to Emma signifies first the failure of religion to provide for her the intensity of passion she desires, then the failure of marriage to do so, then of motherhood, then of unconsummated and consummated extramarital relations, then the failure to attain a panacea for her distress, and finally the futility of her romantic vision even in death.

Chopin’s internal view of Edna, a romance element not present in *Madame Bovary*, reveals that Edna, as her narrator feels and makes us feel, is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). Although Flaubert exhaustively accounts for every detail of Emma’s life and death, his external perspective of her, even at her death, has not explained what drive has motivated her. In his determination to remove romance elements, he has removed the romance element that would present Emma as “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Yet, despite himself, and contrary to his apparent overt intention, he did present her as such. Even though we are denied Emma’s interiority, we come away from her story profoundly sympathetic to her in her very lack of awareness.

Chopin further develops the theme of awakening in another possible allusion to *Madame Bovary*, the reference to the sea and fields. In *Madame Bovary*, Emma has

loved the sea only for the sake of its storms, and the green fields only when broken up by ruins. She wanted to get some personal profit out of

things, and she rejected as useless all that did not contribute to the immediate desires of her heart, being of a temperament more sentimental than artistic, looking for emotions, not landscapes. (39)

Emma's love of the sea only for its storms reflects her need for an intense level of emotion similar to the heaving emotion evoked by some romantic poets, particularly the Spasmodics. The Spasmodics were a minor Victorian school of poets approximately contemporary with the composition of *Madame Bovary*, who "exaggerated pathos without perceiving that the more room given to it, the weaker it becomes" (Hearn 208). Emma values things only insofar as they evoke intense feelings, perhaps by evoking her own lost past. For Emma, as for the Spasmodics, fields broken by ruins are a tactile representation of a lost past.

Emma's temperament, "more sentimental than artistic," suggests that, unlike Edna who displays certain artistic talent, Emma has neither the capacity nor the interest to be an artist. Emma does not see things from a meditative perspective, but only as they "contribute to the immediate desires of her heart" (39). From our external position, we see Emma's desire for intense emotions, but we are not invited to share her emotions so much as to observe them.

The sea and fields evoke quite different responses from Edna. Since the sea is irreducibly involved in Edna's meditative perspective and in her awakening, we see Edna's awareness of the mystery of the sea from an internal position, and awaken with her to its evocative power.

A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her,—the light which, showing the way, forbids it.

At that early period it served but to bewilder her. It moved her to dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she abandoned herself to tears. . . .

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft close embrace. (14-15)

The sea is rich with implications for Edna, evoking the “certain light” that moves her to “thoughtfulness.” The sea is as “sensuous” and as “seductive” as a lover. The “sea speaks to the soul,” inviting it to wander in “solitude” and “inward contemplation.” The sea has depth as does the soul. Chopin implies that no matter how deeply we penetrate the sea, or the soul, there are depths beneath depths, a sense Flaubert never gives us. The image of the sea as it mirrors and corresponds to inner depths that we enter in “contemplation” is a romance element we would not expect from Flaubert.

Fields are also rich with allusions for Edna, referring back to the sea with all its implications. Edna tells Adèle,

“The sight of the water stretching so far away, those motionless sails against the blue sky, . . . made me think . . . of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist.

“. . . I felt as if I must walk on forever.

“Likely as not it was Sunday, . . . and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of.” (17-18)

Edna experiences and apprehends an analogical relation between the sea and fields, with the implication that the fields too are “seductive” and evoke “inward contemplation.” Both the sea and the green fields seem endless. Edna admits she was “running away from prayers” as a child in the field. For her, religion evokes a “spirit of gloom,” of rules, regimens, duty, and imposed obligation related to her father. Adèle goes on to ask,

“And have you been running away from prayers ever since, *ma chere?*” . . .

“No! oh, no! . . . During one period of my life religion took a firm hold on me . . . until—why, I suppose until now. . . . Sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadows again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided.” (18)

Besides conveying a “spirit of gloom,” religion had served as some sort of guide for Edna; she admits that this summer she again feels “unguided.” Although for a portion of her life she had acquiesced to things identified with her father, religion no longer has a “firm hold” on her as she imagines walking again in the fields. The fields and the sea, then, are an escape from the paradoxical “gloom” and guidance of religion. At the same time, “meditation” and “religion” for Edna are unrelated, even antithetical, since she has abandoned religion in favor of “inward contemplation.”

Edna, however, still carrying the strict Calvinistic Presbyterian mores and guidance of her youth, has run, “this summer,” into the more sensual, differently disciplined culture of Creoles of the Catholic faith (Walker, “Feminist” 61).

Never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the harrowing story of one of her *accouchements*, withholding no intimate detail. She was growing accustomed to like shocks, but she could not keep the mounting color back from her cheeks. (11)

The cultural clash has revealed to Edna that what is lacking in her life is the “acme of bliss” (19). The jolt has further loosened her ties with “religion,” both a positive and a negative experience since it has at once contributed to her awakening and to her loss of guidance.

For Emma, the sea and fields only represent the failure to attain her dreams. She is trapped in her bourgeois existence, for which she blames Charles, and her inner turmoil ends in neither the “personal profit” nor the lasting satisfaction of “the

immediate desires of her heart” (39) she had hoped for. Nor does her turmoil end in growth.

The sea and fields were less important to Emma as a child than was religion, with its “romantic melancholies reechoing through the world and eternity!” (39). Emma, too, spends much of her adult life unguided by religion, which held meaning for her only in its romantic connotations. Had religion afforded her “personal profit,” evoked in her heaving emotions, and maintained for her that level of emotions, then Emma would have relied on religion to satisfy the “immediate desires of the heart.” Unfortunately, neither religion, nor the sea and fields, nor her various lovers brought her that satisfaction.

Religion for Edna, if it is antithetical to meditation, affords no more satisfaction than for Emma. Nor can either protagonist be satisfied by one or another lover. Yet the sea and fields have a stronger relation than religion or sexuality both to Edna’s meditative awakening to an immense encompassing reality and also ultimately to her death.

Mention of the sea foreshadows Edna’s death. The sea is sensual, almost sexual, in chapter one: “The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace” (15). Yet when exactly the same sentence appears on the final page, the “voice of the sea,” which has been instrumental in Edna’s awakening as it “speaks to the soul,” now seduces her to her death as, once again, “The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace” (113).

As the sea is related to the fields of Edna’s youth, fields too contribute to the foreshadowing of a seduction to her death. Edna felt she must “walk on forever” in the

fields as a child, foreshadowing her similar feelings at her death in the sea: "She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end" (113-114).

The sea and fields carry neither meditative nor seductive connotations for Emma nor a foreshadowing of Emma's suicide. Yet Chopin alludes to Flaubert with the intention of making available and useful an internal awareness of Edna as opposed to the external awareness we have of Emma.

Chopin has made some pointed and obvious allusions to *Madame Bovary*, but she has used them to set off by contrast a very different experience and awareness in her protagonist. While Flaubert has given us an exhaustive account of Emma's motives and disillusionments from an external perspective, Chopin has accessed Edna's awareness for Edna and for us from an internal perspective. The directness of Chopin's allusions indicates that she was conscious of the implications she posited in the departure.

Flaubert's intention is to give us such absolute detail of Emma from an external, realist perspective that nothing is left over, so that the portrayal of her is "no more than a transcription of real life . . . 'le réel écrit'" (Watt 30). Although he gives an interior view, his perspective, much like that of a psychoanalyst, is from outside. Suggesting that it is possible to explain Emma's experience, he worked intensely for five years to remove romance elements and bring a real Emma into our presence. Yet, since his realist perspective, by definition, remains external to Emma, something of Emma is left over, is denied to our awareness. Despite his exhaustive account of the sense of Emma's motives and desires in each situation, nothing Flaubert tells us quite explains

the ultimate motive that drives her throughout the book, perhaps implying that no such motive exists or is worth attending to.

Chopin, on the other hand, is less concerned with presenting us with exhaustive external details of Edna. Rather, she makes us conscious, with her allusions to *Madame Bovary*, that by returning to the more interior perspective characteristic of romance and by using soft naturalist elements, “differen[t] in kind as well as degree” (Carter 404) from earlier hard, deterministic naturalism, she can reveal at least the character of Edna’s motivations, her growing awareness, and her desire to escape temporal limitations. Although Chopin does not suggest, as does Flaubert, that she can explain Edna’s experience, she is able to present us the awareness of a person “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Although it was not Flaubert’s similar intention, formally, to present Emma as “fearfully and wonderfully made,” he did finally present her as such despite himself. We are sympathetic to Emma’s lack of growth and the futility of her suicide because we are made to feel, somehow, that she is more than the sum of her parts, her psychological motives, her actions and desires. That is why Flaubert and we, his readers, care about her. We are more conscious, at the end of Chopin’s novel, why we care about Edna. For that reason, perhaps, our sense of caring is more intense.

Chopin's Internal Versus Flaubert's External Perspective

From "Lines Suggested by Omar"

Ah! Drink, my soul, the splendor of the day;
 Quaff from the golden goblet oft and deep.
 Darkness will come again; too long 'twill stay—
 The everlasting night of dreamless sleep.
 (n.d., first published in *Private Papers* 289)

Similarities and differences in plot and minor details in *Madame Bovary* and *The Awakening* are a direct result of differences in the guiding visions of Flaubert and Chopin. These visions are manifest in the two authors' adherence to characteristics of realism and naturalism, including related language use and point of view. To clarify Chopin's intentions in adopting and altering Flaubert's strict realist plot, I will examine in detail implications of her romantic naturalism as it opposes Flaubert's strict objective realism and deterministic naturalism and as it thus contributes to the documented evolution of naturalism.

Before *Madame Bovary*, the conventions of romance and their implied unknowable reality had not been separated scrupulously from the novel, even though the novel form had existed for 200 years. Flaubert was among the first to approach purity in his realism. Flaubert attempts to remove all traces of romance from his novel as he debunks the romantic ideal. He must eliminate all traces, all hints, that there is anything about his characters or their motivations that "we can never directly know" (James, "Preface" *Art* 32). What we are made to see of his characters and their world is all there is to see or at least represents synecdochically all there is to see. The details, more of the same, could be amassed indefinitely. The outcome of such thoroughgoing

“realism” leads inevitably to a “naturalist” perspective and leaves Flaubert himself as a cynical, disillusioned Emma Bovary; in Flaubert’s words, “Madame Bovary, c’est moi!” (Steegmuller 217). As noted in chapter one, *Madame Bovary* is an example of realism so pure that it becomes indistinguishable from deterministic naturalism with its “notion of an indifferent universe” (Levine 236). Everett Carter explains that the task in early realism and deterministic naturalism is

to tell the truth, through fiction, about the ordinary world of physical experience. And the first way to do this . . . was to narrow the gap between fiction and nonfiction, to write fiction that was largely autobiographical, that was one’s own experience clarified by the perspective of the fictional technique. The novel . . . becomes the only true autobiography, for only by putting on the “mask” of the teller of tales can a man show his real face beneath it. (“Realism” 386)

Reflecting this notion in his identity with Emma Bovary, Flaubert believed that the environmental influences of his youth were “pointers to an ultimate disenchantment” (Spencer 18). He wrote to a friend in 1846 that life “was like a nauseous smell of cooking escaping from a vent. You don’t need to eat it to know that it will make you sick” (Spencer 18). Lamenting the “cruelty latent in life” (Spencer 18), Flaubert felt compelled nevertheless to convey accurately life’s cruelty.

The son of a doctor, Flaubert was introduced at an early age to science and the correspondence of scientific terms to the patient. His father was head of the Hotel-Dieu, a hospital in Rouen. As an adult, Flaubert reminisced about his childhood. Philip Spencer retells one account in *Flaubert: a Biography*:

Periodically a covered stretcher was carried across the court to the dissecting-room and by climbing up the vine in the garden Gustave and Caroline could gaze through the window at the bodies stretched out on slabs in a haze of flies, till Dr. Flaubert noticed them and waved them away with his scalpel. . . . and when [Gustave] recalled his youth he

always spoke of the Hotel-Dieu as one of the factors conditioning his later outlook. (18)

Such early experiences must have conditioned Flaubert's later sense that life is ugly and meaningless and determined by forces beyond our control. Because of the inevitability of those forces, Flaubert portrays Emma's romantic yearnings as silly and vain. Every "romantic" action Emma takes provokes a "realistic" or "naturalistic" reaction, implying a determinism that she neither escapes nor becomes aware of.

The description in *A Handbook to Literature* of the objectives and effects of the naturalist author exactly describes Flaubert's work in *Madame Bovary* and may even be said to be derived from it either immediately or remotely: The naturalist author strives to be "objective, even documentary, . . . amoral, . . . pessimistic in his view of human capabilities" (339); in his "almost clinically direct" portrayal of man as subject to "fundamental urges," he portrays life as a "vicious trap, a cruel game" (339), notions explicit in *Madame Bovary*.

Flaubert's judgment that life is cruel and meaningless seems final and absolute. In passing that judgment, he takes an outside perspective, such as God would take, or a clinician defining a pathology. Since he admits that the creature he thus observes "c'est moi," the disease he defines must be of himself. In essence, then, Flaubert attacks the romantic representation of the self and its apprehended "reality" from the dispassionate position of a scientist. Although the essence of life might be awareness and emotion, he tends to account for that awareness and emotion scientifically and unemotionally, as "the writing of *Bovary* [becomes] a prolonged autopsy, an excision of the Romantic cancer" (Spencer 131).

Partially as a result, perhaps, of Flaubert's early experience of the "real" as a dead body on a dissecting table, under the scalpel and the detached observation of the scientist, *Madame Bovary* reads much like a psychological or pathological case study. Flaubert explains the motives of his characters with the detachment and finality of a psychoanalyst or of a physician reporting the results of a post-mortem examination. With precise language, his narrator's exhaustive, detailed account of Emma implies the possibility that human beings can fully and dispassionately know reality, even the reality of their own being. Flaubert suggests that the dispassionate observer can identify all the motives and make definitive conclusions about a character.

In the realist perspective, the base motives of the human organism, such as greed and pride, are the only "real" motives. From this perspective, Emma's only possible hope would be to recognize her base motives and escape them to the extent of living at least without deluding herself. But Emma never escapes her romantic vision and so never gains the realist's "truth" about herself, her motives, or her condition.

The novel, then, certainly as represented by *Madame Bovary*, is an anti-romantic genre, even if one understands the romance to represent dimensions of ourselves and our motives that we can never fully apprehend or comprehend. A realist's implicit definition of romance, however, is that which is unrealistic, that which is pretty but not true, while realism, as Northrop Frye points out, is "the art of verisimilitude, [and] evokes the response 'How like that is to what we know!'" (*Anatomy* 136).

In developing and adding naturalistic elements to his novel, Flaubert was influenced by Hippolyte Taine, a trusted friend, critic, and correspondent. Taine was a positivist after the manner of August Comte, a French philosopher from a generation

earlier. Comte claimed that the right attitude toward society's problems was a scientific attitude. He argued for the replacement of the "supernatural" and the "metaphysical" with "observation, analysis, and classification" (Carter, "Realism" 384). Everett Carter credits Taine's *History of English Literature* with unprecedented influence in the movement from realism toward naturalism, explaining that

Taine's transformation of Comte's philosophy of social positivism into the conception of literature as a product of "*race, milieu, et moment*" of each author is well known. . . . Literature, Taine said in essence, must be the principal method by which society and men are observed, analyzed, and classified. Fiction should be the scientific laboratory of society—the laboratory in which the complex components of our social system are unified with each other so that the race might watch the experiment, see the result, and be better able to make decisions affecting its life.
(“Realism” 385)

Taine “enjoyed the friendship of Flaubert, Saint-Beuve, and Renan and attended the famous literary dinners at the restaurant Magny where those who mattered complimented each other on their wit and fame” (Gargan xxx). Taine also frequented Flaubert’s “Sundays” (Steegmuller 63).

Flaubert places Hippolyte Taine in *Madame Bovary* in the character of “a clubfooted man called Hippolyte Tautain” (*Bovary* 193).¹ Contemporary readers would

¹ Flaubert’s tribute to Taine, along with his adherence to Taine’s philosophy, clarifies for us Flaubert’s naturalist tendencies. Charles Bovary, a pseudo-scientist, botches an experimental surgery “on a clubfooted man called Hippolyte Tautain, stable man for the last twenty-five years at the hotel of the ‘Lion d’Or’” (*Bovary* 193). Homais, Flaubert’s bumbling bourgeois pseudo-chemist, extols the surgery and the surgeon in one of his regular letters to the newspaper:

“Honor, then, to the generous savants! Honor to those indefatigable spirits who consecrate their vigils to the amelioration or to the alleviation of their kind! Honor, thrice honor! . . . that which fanaticism formerly promised to the elect, science now accomplishes for all men.” (*Bovary* 193)
Rapidly Hippolyte’s leg deteriorates, until Dr.Canivet, a “celebrity” from Neufchatel, is called in. He remonstrates the bunglers:

“These are the inventions of Paris! These are the ideas of those gentry of the capital! . . . they want to do the clever, and they cram you with remedies without troubling about the consequences.” . . .

This amputation of the thigh by Dr. Canivet was a great event in the village. (*Bovary* 197)
Flaubert’s coup, both to misdirected science and to French bourgeois politics, is notable.

have recognized the reference in Charles's misinformed scientific "experiment" on Tautain and appreciated it as a tribute to Taine's notion of society as the writer's laboratory. Adhering to Taine's philosophy, Flaubert also "observed, analyzed, and classified" Emma Bovary so that he and his readers might "watch the experiment" and realize the futility of romantic yearnings.

The Awakening, written at a time marked by a rise in naturalism, displays somewhat different naturalistic elements than does *Madame Bovary*. While both the narrator and the reader of *Madame Bovary* are fully aware of Emma's motives, neither Edna Pontellier nor the narrator nor the reader fully comprehends the forces that motivate Edna. Rather, Chopin gives Edna's yearnings validity and conveys the sense that Edna is not entirely caught by those forces that produce her yearning. She still exercises some choice in her life.

In the "presumed 'naturalist' of the younger generation of writers, 'naturalism' in the sense of pervasive pessimistic determinism is . . . hard to find" (Carter, "Realism" 402). As touched on in chapter one, evolving naturalism in America, according to Carter, was a

deepening and broadening of the realistic and critically realistic techniques . . . extended to larger areas of society. But . . . one becomes aware of the beginnings of a difference in kind as well as degree, a difference in treatment as well as a difference in materials . . . the surface was beginning to break up, and through its fissures were welling strange new visions: ogres and demigods, grotesqueries, and distortions of time and space which we associate with the romantics and an earlier time . . . these were the landscapes and creatures of the human mind. (Carter 403)

The psychological and the mystic seem to join in Edna's actions. Certainly, many of her actions are not the result of her conscious will. Edna markedly loses her sense of conscious control over her actions the morning after she learns to swim, when,

the narrator says, “she was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility”

(*Awakening* 33).

Later the next day during the boat ride to *Chênrière Caminada* with Robert,

Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening—had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad, leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails. (35)

Edna, who feels as if she is being “borne away” from her moorings, nevertheless maintains the ability to choose the direction to “set her sails.” Yet, as she is “borne away” by a force other than her own consciousness, the implication is that she has relinquished control to that force, a conscious choice in itself. The “mystic force” controls Edna even while it makes her more free as she simultaneously drifts and sets her sails. Chopin’s use of the term “mystic” differs from any terms used by Flaubert. “Mystic” is a term we would be more likely to hear from Emma in her search for romance than from Flaubert’s narrator in his description of her actions and motives. Chopin unearths some “landscapes and creatures of the human mind” in her use of both mystic and psychological elements.

After Edna experiences the intersection of “mystic force” and conscious choice, she no longer attempts to conform her actions, thoughts, and feelings to convention. Rather, “She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked” (57). She paints because, “I feel like painting. . . . Perhaps I shan’t always feel like it” (57). At the same time, her actions and moods seem to depend more on her surroundings than on her conscious choice. “When the weather was dark and cloudy Edna could not work. She needed the sun to mellow and temper her mood to the sticking point” (73).

Increasingly, Edna acts according to what seems to those about her, and even to herself at times, as whim, seemingly without conscious choice. Even while she asserts her will in a series of unconventional choices and actions, the force that controls her apparently leads her to her death; “she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her” (113).

In Flaubert, then, we see greater attention to pure realism with naturalistic elements apparent in scientific determinism, “social positivism,” and allusions to natural science, while in Chopin we see elements of a newly emerging naturalism, “differen[t] in kind” from Flaubert’s naturalism, apparent in the “impulses” and the “vision inward” (Carter, “Realism” 385, 403) that move Edna. We also see in Flaubert’s realism an obsessive determination to avoid romance elements, while Chopin’s naturalism displays many romance elements she retained from her youthful reading of novels such as *The Days of Bruce*. The addition of romance elements allows us a more subjective apprehension of her characters, their motive forces and desires.

One implication of the mystic in newer naturalism is the return to the romance belief in providential ordering. Before Flaubert, many nineteenth-century writers, like Austen, Dickens, and Grace Aguilar, allowed their plots to work out providentially. When we look at events arranged in such a providential perspective, we find an order that, to a thoroughgoing realist like Flaubert, does not exist. In rejecting a vision of providence, Flaubert, in essence, takes God’s place and disallows a successful providential resolution. Flaubert’s scientific, almost God-like, perspective enables him to name, identify, and make definitive conclusions about what it means to live a temporal existence, bounded by a beginning and an end. Flaubert attempts to re-create

subjects “as God sees them, in their true essence. . . . The universe is a work of art produced without any taking of sides . . . [so] the realistic artist must imitate the procedures of Creation” (Auerbach 407).

Chopin is also concerned with temporal limitations. As Edna’s awareness grows, she recognizes that what she desires to escape are the temporal limitations of the flesh. Edna’s dilemma includes her awareness that, having some free will, she still cannot escape constraints inherent in a temporal existence. This recognition is precisely what Emma never achieves, even as events of her temporal existence form and delimit her.

The narrator’s attention to details and to temporal limitations in *Madame Bovary* is antithetical to the vision that drives Emma. Emma hates and tries continuously to escape boring details, such as where the money will come from to pay for “a black barège, twelve yards, just enough to make a gown” (*Bovary* 277), or how she would return the “five-franc pieces” she “borrowed” from Monsieur Derozeray’s account: “‘Pshaw!’ she thought, ‘he won’t think about it again’” (*Bovary* 206).

Rather, Emma wants her life to be full and rich in the same way it is in her romance novels. It matters little what form the fullness takes, whether it be in religion, marriage, or illicit lovers, so long as it is an escape from the tedious, mundane reality that stifles her. She should be the heroine in a Balzac novel, in which Balzac, unlike Flaubert, takes

every entanglement as tragic, every urge as a great passion; he is always ready to declare every person in misfortune a hero or a saint; if it is a woman he compares her to an angel or the Madonna; every energetic scoundrel, and above all every figure who is at all sinister, he converts into a demon. (Auerbach 482)

Despite her best efforts, Emma can never make her life correspond to Balzac's romantic vision.

We see an example of the inadequacy of Emma's romantic ideal after she consummates her relationship with Rodolphe. She is ecstatic as "the heights of sentiment sparkled under her thought, and ordinary existence appeared only afar off" (*Bovary* 176). She has opted, as usual, for sentiment over "ordinary existence." Flaubert immediately equates her choice of sentiment with her choice of reading material:

Then she recalled the heroines of the books that she had read, and the lyric legion of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voice of sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, an actual part of these imaginings, and realized the love dream of her youth as she saw herself in this type of amorous women whom she had so envied. (176)

Yet almost immediately, Rodolphe pulls the rug from under her fantasy, declaring "with a serious air that her visits were becoming imprudent—that she was compromising herself" (178).

As Edna becomes aware both of the unalterability of her temporal limitations and of her intense desire—even need—to alter or escape those limitations, she comes to an identity and self-recognition that is denied Emma. Since Edna experiences self-recognition, we expect to find more romance elements in Chopin's novel than in Flaubert's. As with Emma, no circumstance can satisfy Edna. The difference is that Edna becomes aware that she can never satisfy, in the world, her deepest longings. A more modern sensibility than Emma, Edna shares Emma's vision but knows that even if her lover would conform, it would not help. She becomes aware that, even though she cannot escape the yearning, "the day would come when [Robert] too, and the thought of

him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone" (*Awakening* 113). A comparable realization never comes to Emma.

* * * * *

For the literary realist Flaubert, the proper use of language is critical. Adhering to Locke's conception that rhetoric and metaphor are superfluous, he must avoid the analogical, symbolic language of romance if he is to re-create reality and present his characters with detached, scientific objectivity. Although Flaubert balked at being labeled a realist, since "it seemed to him a naïve illusion to imagine that reality could be adequately perceived merely by looking at it," he nonetheless used realism "as an anchor against the shifting tides of imagination" (Spencer 138), and, as such, as a tool against romance. In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert remained, to the best of his ability, true to his vision of realism, including its related use of concrete language.

Perhaps best expressing Flaubert's concerns with language, Maupassant refers to his apprenticeship under his master in the introduction to *Pierre et Jean*. Flaubert taught him, he says, in "long and patient lessons" (xv), that

there is only one noun to express [whatever one wishes to say], only one verb to give it life, only one adjective to qualify it. We must search, then, till that noun, that verb, that adjective, are discovered; never be content with an approximation, never resort to tricks, even clever ones, or to verbal pirouettes, to escape the difficulty. (xvi-xvii)

Flaubert complains that as a result of such an obsession,

my head reels and throat aches with chasing after, slogging over, delving into, turning round, groping after, and bellowing in a hundred thousand different ways, a sentence that I've at last finished. (qtd in Spencer 125)

Chopin, too, was much concerned with proper expression in her work. Emily Toth has recently found evidence, in the papers now called the "Rankin-Marhefka

Fragments,” that Chopin rewrote and revised her stories more than she or her children would have had us believe (*Unveiling* 167):

Chopin was far more disciplined and thorough than she claimed. The fragments are scrawled in pencil, with words crossed out and inserted. . . . The fragments show that she was a diligent reviser who thought deeply about minute changes in wording. (167)

Yet Chopin professed to prefer “the integrity of crudities” (*Works* 722) to a precision achieved at the price of eclipsing essential but unsayable dimensions of her characters’ appearance and awareness. Unlike Flaubert, who implies that reality is expressible, Chopin appreciates the inexpressibility of some part of reality. A certain spontaneity or the appearance thereof that we find in Chopin’s work is consistent with the traditional romantic sense of the mysterious source and mysterious reference of language. She implies that the reality beyond the observable “real” can never be expressed totally, but can better be expressed in images arising from its apprehension, however comparatively vague and indistinct.

Conversely, Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*, avoids a spontaneous flow of language as he attempts to remove all romance elements, including imagery. That is, he avoids imagery and figurative language for his narrator, but allows Emma the use of such in order to reveal its futility. He uses a bird metaphor, for example, only as it enters Emma’s romantic perspective. When Charles first courts Emma, his presence

had sufficed to make her believe that she at last felt that wondrous passion which, till then, like a great bird with rose-colored wings, hung in the splendor of the skies of poetry. (43)

We are aware that the “skies of poetry” are a sham to Flaubert. Yet later, as Léon and Emma are tiring of each other, she wishes, again futilely, that she could become a bird:

She wished that, taking wing like a bird, she could fly somewhere, far away to regions of purity, and there grow young again. (319)

Emma finds neither the lasting “wondrous passion” nor the way to “grow young again” that the bird imagery has represented to her. Flaubert reveals the romantic illusion as it manifests itself in imagery, an illusion to which Emma succumbs and against which he fights.

In her reconsideration of *Madame Bovary*, Chopin returns to the earlier tradition of romance, a tradition from which she consistently refuses to depart, restoring imagery and affirming that imagery in language can express the unknown dimensions of reality in a way the discursive language of realism cannot. If Chopin has adopted from Flaubert the bird metaphor that appears also in *The Awakening*, she gives it a resonance in experience that it lacks when Flaubert uses it to convey Emma’s illusory visionings.

Actually, Chopin employs several different bird metaphors to open us to different awarenesses: first to the narrator’s sympathy for Edna, then to Edna’s yearning for freedom from constraints, and finally to Mademoiselle Reisz’s sympathetic awareness of Edna. The “mother-woman” is represented as a hen with her brood, as the narrator extends the metaphor in order to show empathy with Edna’s rejection of such an image for herself:

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. (10)

The narrator’s opinion of the net result of being a mother-woman is revealed in her choice of the word “efface.” As a result of that word alone, the hen as symbol for

nurturing mother takes on negative connotations. Edna, unlike Adèle Ratignolle, does not have the hen's plumage.

A different bird metaphor appears when Adèle plays the "minor strain" that Edna names "Solitude," perhaps alluding to or deriving from Chopin's original name for her story, "A Solitary Soul." The narrative places in the reader's mind Edna's image of

the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him. (26-27)

This bird, possibly a seagull, symbolizes for Edna a flight to freedom as it foreshadows the scene of her death, when she too stood on the seashore, "naked under the sky!" (113).

Much later, Mademoiselle Reisz, an "emancipated" woman rather than a "mother-woman," recalls another bird, here possibly a hawk or an eagle, as a metaphor for strength. In revealing her own strength, Mademoiselle Reisz also reveals that, in her desire to escape certain temporal limitations, she, too, is a "romantic" figure. In Mademoiselle Reisz's image,

"The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth." (82)

Mademoiselle Reisz is speaking to Edna's need for strength to overcome constraints placed on her. Yet, while Mademoiselle Reisz tries to soar above "tradition and prejudice," she still lives a conventional Bohemian lifestyle. For Edna to live as Mademoiselle Reisz lives would be to give up some of her self, to conform, in this case, to Mademoiselle Reisz's nonconformity. Edna is not willing to conform even to that

degree. She is no more suited to be the “emancipated” woman than the “traditional,” or mother-woman (Seyersted, *Chopin* 103).

When Edna contemplates her final walk into the sea, she has realized the futility of Mademoiselle Reisz’s comparatively abstract image of a “bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition.” In contrast to this figure, as Edna stands on the shore, “A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water” (113). This figure that simply presents itself before her embodies something of her own sense of herself and foreshadows her imminent surrender to the sea. Unlike Mademoiselle Reisz’s image, this is not an image that Edna would choose for herself or with which she can find satisfaction. Yet Chopin chooses this naturalistic image to allow the reader sensibly to apprehend and take the measure of Edna’s circumstances—a fragile, broken bird against all the forces of wind and wave—and so to provoke profound sympathy for her.

The dominant governing instance of Chopin’s figurative use of language is her image of “awakening,” an image we examined extensively in the previous chapter. As we have seen, for Flaubert “awakening” always denotes at best a recognition of the present, concrete situation, while for Chopin the image connotes an inner, spiritual awakening. The subtle difference illustrates the “heaping up” of concrete details in Flaubert’s realism as it differs from Chopin’s return to imagery and romance elements characteristic of the emergent soft naturalism.

* * * * *

A concern closely related to language is point of view, which is more critical in realism than in romance. Flaubert’s narrator assumes authority for the information we

are given. Yet Flaubert's narrator is vexing; he is at once first-person and omniscient. The omniscient perspective allows the narrator to enter any character and report his or her awareness, while the first-person perspective establishes the narrator as a story-teller whose authority is limited to events that he himself has been present at and observed. Both these perspectives are essential if Flaubert is to maintain the detachment and authority of a scientist and yet develop the full impact of the story. Flaubert's intention is to express observable, tangible reality fully, including motives of characters, while he suggests that truth is accessible by the careful observation of which any intelligent person is capable. His goal is a report of truth that conforms to his reader's experience and perceptions.²

Madame Bovary opens as the first-person narrator, an eyewitness who was Charles's classmate, recalls the "new fellow" from childhood:

We were in class when the head master came in, followed by a new fellow, not wearing the school uniform, and a school servant carrying a large desk. Those who had been asleep woke up, and everyone rose as if just surprised at his work. (3)

In the opening scene, the narrator appears to be "writing what he remembers about Charles many years later" (Williams 31):

The new fellow, standing in the corner behind the door so that he could hardly be seen, was a country lad of about fifteen, and taller than any of us. . . . Although he was not broad-shouldered, his short school jacket of green cloth with black buttons must have been tight about the armholes. (3)

The comment that the jacket "must have been tight" suggests that the eyewitness is recollecting the incident rather than observing it in the present. This first-person

²Flaubert never uses this narrator to mark a distinction of gender in terms of susceptibility to illusion. By saying "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*," he reveals his belief that illusion is the bane of both man and woman.

narrator displays no subjective attachment to the character as he recalls the past event. He does not present himself as Charles's friend or intimate acquaintance. At the same time, the eyewitness attains credibility because he is reporting events that he actually saw (Williams 31). The fact that the events occurred some time ago allows the narrator to distance himself even more from them and from his subjective, boyhood perspective of the moment.

Five pages later, the narrator appears to assume a different perspective, introducing Charles's father from an omniscient point of view. The apparent shift is vexing since our eyewitness seems to know Charles Sr. intimately:

Once married, [Charles Sr.] lived for three or four years on his wife's fortune, dining well, rising late, smoking long porcelain pipes, not coming in at night till after the theatre, and haunting cafés. The father-in-law died, leaving little; he was indignant at this, "went in for the business," lost some money in it, then retired to the country, where he thought he would make money. (6)

Since the omniscient narrator knows more about Charles Sr. presumably than a classmate of Charles could know, it is tempting, as John Williams has done, to explain away the dichotomy:

Once Flaubert has exploited [first-person narration] for the effect it has to offer, he abruptly shifts the viewpoint to the omniscient narrator who breaks in to give background information about Charles and his family, facts which the first-person observer could not have known. (32)

Williams seems to avoid the vexing inconsistency of the narrative point of view by simply explaining it away. Nowhere, however, is there evidence that a new narrator is breaking in. Three pages later the first-person narrator again identifies himself as such. We are told that Charles was sent to school at Rouen and that "it would now be impossible for any of *us* to remember anything about him" (9, emphasis added).

At the same time, the omniscient narrator remembers something about him after all:

His mother chose a room for him on the fourth floor of a dyer's she knew, overlooking the Eau-de-Robec. She made arrangements for his board, got him furniture, . . . and bought besides a small cast-iron stove with the supply of wood that was to warm the poor child. Then at the end of a week she departed, after a thousand injunctions to be good now that he was going to be left to himself. (9-10)

Had Flaubert intended to introduce a different narrator, considering his obsession with accuracy and exactness, he would have wanted his readers to be aware of the shift. Rather, he seems consciously to maintain a single "first-person omniscient" narrator. This "first-person omniscient" narrator is appropriate for Flaubert's purpose and does not need to be explained away, since the realist perspective implies that it is possible, without calling on a higher power, to know reality exhaustively in essence if not in detail.

The reason for Flaubert's choice of narrator seems to be epistemological, concerned, that is, with how we know what we know. His choice of point of view, therefore, correlates with the language concerns of his "realism." An omniscient narrator can perceive Emma as she is rather than through the tint of a necessarily distorting subjective consciousness. A first-person narrator can explain her motivations and behavior from the perspective of a scientist—like a psychoanalyst—who is witness to her life. Flaubert can maintain authorial distance from the character while he reveals everything about the character. At one and the same time, Flaubert can remain objective and external to characters as he knows and tells all about them, implying the possibility that a human can know reality—even the reality of human emotion and motivation—fully and dispassionately.

Yet the narrator never expresses an opinion concerning Emma's motivations, relying instead on the reader's awareness of what it means to be human and the possibilities of life as we live it. His observations and conclusions about his characters' behavior and motivations may be corroborated and certified by the reader's recognition—from his or her own experience—of their accuracy. The reader can see, in every instance, the correlation between a character's motive and action and between action and consequences. Flaubert's "first-person omniscient" narrative perspective allows him and his readers to look at Emma with detachment, make observations about her behavior, motives, desires, and guiding vision, and withhold sympathy, until he finally arrives with the reader at an exhaustive accounting of her disposition, her intentions, and her incapacity to grow in awareness.

The implications of this realist perspective account for the reaction against the book, since moral standards from the European realist perspective are decidedly contrary to conventional morality. While from Flaubert's realist perspective, real motives are base motives, the conventional majority insists on dissimulation of those motives. Flaubert's narrator, then, seems to tell us all there is to know about Emma, including her base, "real" motives, leaving no part of her awareness that we have not penetrated and seen the whole of. Flaubert's ultimate intention seems to be to present all there is of Emma with nothing left over. In essence, Flaubert's narrator allows us to know Emma in a way she never knows herself.

In contrast, we can know Edna and her motives no better than she herself knows them. Nancy Walker summarizes narrative differences in *The Awakening* and *Madame Bovary*:

Parallels between the novels are not precise, and it is especially significant that whereas Flaubert takes an external view of Emma Bovary, presenting her rather like a case study, Chopin allows the reader to view events from Edna's consciousness. ("Critical" 144)

As noted in chapter 5, Susan Rosowski explains that "the ironic distance of *Madame Bovary* is replaced by a high degree of narrative sympathy" (46). Emma's inability to know what the reader and the narrator know results in "ironic distance"; conversely, the simultaneous awakening of Edna and the narrator and the reader to Edna's interior sensibility and awareness results in a sympathetic apprehension of her motives.

Chopin's internal perspective is a form of "central intelligence" similar to that used by Henry James. Her narrator initially introduces characters from an external, objective perspective. On page eight, the narrator first reveals her internal awareness of Edna's consciousness:

[Edna] could not have told why she was crying. . . .

An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. (8)

Millicent Bell comments on similar narration in works by Henry James that might better illustrate Chopin's intentions. James's "central consciousness," Bell explains, "confines us to the subjectivity of a single observer who can never know everything" (14). William R. Goetz adds that James's

focalized third-person narrator . . . hides his own subjectivity behind that of the characters.

The real virtue of focalized narrative for James is that it does not exclude subjectivity but assigns it its proper place. (27)

With such a "limited narrator," Orson Scott Card explains, "we get a much deeper, more intense involvement with the lives of the viewpoint characters" (159). Since we become more intensely involved with Edna, Chopin is able, among other things, to

appeal to the reader's sympathy with Edna's departure from conventional manners and morals.

Frank Norris would call Chopin's evocation of our involvement with Edna a romance element, explaining that "Romance" is not fabricated only to "amuse and entertain you, singing you sweet songs." "Romance" also can

call to you from the squalor of . . . a disorderly house, crying "Look! listen! This, too, is life. These, too, are my children! Look at them, know them and, knowing them, help!" (344)

Edna's poverty, of course, for which our sympathy is evoked, is not material but spiritual. She has been deprived, in some sense, of herself:

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight—perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman.

But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!
(14-15)

Chopin's narrator employs romance conventions of representation and invites us to learn something of ourselves as we sympathize with Edna. As we have seen in Chopin's short story, "A Visit to Avoyelles," a sympathetic narrator is capable at times of overturning conventional morals. In that story, the reader anticipates and would welcome the escape of Mentine from her abusive husband. In a striking departure from the realist notion that real motives are necessarily base motives, Chopin's sympathetic narrator in *The Awakening* also portrays and defends some less conventional motives and morals.

Chopin's narrator offers a premise unlike that of Flaubert, who does not express the possibility of any emergence from a meaningless life other than an awareness of its meaninglessness, of an inchoate "beginning" beyond our observable actions and determinable motives into which our reason cannot penetrate. Chopin's narrator openly sympathizes with Edna and solicits empathy from the reader for Edna's growing sense of her own mystery.

As we have seen in our discussion of Léonce's misperception of Edna's dilemma, even when Chopin's narrator sees through Léonce's consciousness, she intervenes to reveal sympathy for Edna:

It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world. (57)

We briefly enter Léonce's consciousness, but we quickly see that he misapprehends Edna's changes as mental unbalance rather than as growing awareness. A subjective narrator intervenes to assure us that mental unbalance is not Edna's problem; rather, Edna is becoming "Edna" and rejecting society's acceptable role of wife and mother that she has only worn "like a garment." Léonce cannot apprehend that with which the narrator and the reader sympathize.

Through a sympathetic, subjective narrator not only do we see Edna's perspective, but also we see from within Edna's perspective, in a way we never see from within Emma's. We see how Edna sees things and something of what she sees, our awareness of her interior dimensions and capacities grows with her awareness, and we acquire thereby a profound sympathy for her.

Whereas for Flaubert, all of Emma's romantic visions are illusory, for Chopin, some essential part of Edna's are not. Chopin gives credence and validity to something expressed in Edna's longings and envisionings, which Flaubert never does for Emma. For example, Flaubert never validates Emma's need, however ill apprehended or expressed, that results in her suicide. Although her immediate motivations are apparent, we are not invited to sympathize. Yet we never doubt that she purposely takes her life since Flaubert spares no gruesome detail:

“Ah! it is beginning,” she murmured. . . .

Drops of sweat oozed from her bluish face, that seemed as if rigid in the exhalations of a metallic vapor. Her teeth chattered, her dilated eyes looked vaguely about her. . . . Gradually, her moaning grew louder; a hollow shriek burst from her; . . . she was seized with convulsions and cried out—

“Ah! my God! It is horrible!” (345-46)

Flaubert's clinical details place the horror of Emma's death before us with detached precision.

Chopin's view of Edna as she takes her own life is notably different from Flaubert's clinical account of Emma's suicide. Chopin struggles to give expression to Edna's simultaneous yearning for something she cannot name or imagine and her inability to overcome temporal limitations. At the same time, Edna's motivations are more vexing.

Because her motivations are more ambiguous, they are more of an issue for critics. Judith Fryer suggests that “Edna chooses to die because it is the one, the ultimate act of free will open to her” (256). Soledad Jasin says that Emma “opts for death” because of the “loss of honor associated with insolvency in bourgeois society” (21). On the other hand, Edna's suicide results since “she can only attain love as an

object rather than as a subject” (23). Helen V. Emmitt argues that Edna’s death is not “suicide [or] taking one’s life into one’s own hands; neither Maggie [Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*] nor Edna makes a conscious choice” (317). Rather,

[Edna’s] fatigue— “it was too late; the shore was far behind her and her strength was gone” (p. 114)—suggests that while her actions free her from her old life, her swim is not meant to be a swim of death, and thus her death is not an act of free will. (324)

In a slightly different vein, Sandra Gilbert argues that

Edna’s last swim is not a suicide—that is, a death—at all, or if it is a death it is a death associated with resurrection. . . . She is still swimming when we last see her. . . . Chopin seems determined to regenerate Edna through a regeneration of romance, of fantasy. (327-28)

Yet, even though critics fail to agree whether Edna makes a conscious decision to take her life or whether she simply swims too far into the sea, her thoughts are open to the reader:

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known. . . .

The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. (113)

Edna’s awareness is open to us until the end because we have not been denied awareness of her motive forces as she experiences them. The ambiguity of her final motive gives us the sense that she, too, feels ambivalence even as the subjective narrator evokes our sympathy.

Neither Emma’s nor Edna’s death is the direct result of a failed relationship. Throughout their marriage, Emma has been embarrassed by Charles’s lack of success. Always trying to live the life she thought she deserved but that Charles could never offer her, she goes deeper and deeper into debt. Her final humiliation is the “distrain”

against the Bovarys (323) and the fact that no one is willing or able to bail her out.

After Rodolphe refuses to lend her money,

Madness was coming upon her; she grew afraid, and managed to recover herself, in a confused way, it is true, for she did not in the least remember the cause of the terrible condition she was in, that is to say, the question of money. She suffered only in her love, and felt her soul passing from her in this memory, as wounded men, dying, feel their life ebb from their bleeding wounds. (342)

While the “cause” of her “condition” eludes her, at least temporarily, her grief is not for her loss of Rodolphe or for Léon, but for her lack of an ineffable “love” that would have made her whole.

She decides to escape by the only means available to her:

Now her situation, like an abyss, rose up before her. She was panting as if her heart would burst. Then in an ecstasy of heroism, that made her almost joyous, she ran down the hill . . . and reached the chemist’s shop. (343)

Consistent with Emma’s valuing only that which evokes intense feelings, she becomes “almost joyous” at the prospect of destroying her world by leaving it. Her delusion of “heroism” recalls the romances of Balzac, who “is always ready to declare every person in misfortune a hero or a saint” (Auerbach 482). Flaubert, however, cannot be true to his realist perspective and yet allow Emma’s death to be an act of heroism. Instead, he describes extensively the physical horror of her suicide and her changed perception of her action, neither sympathizing with her nor condemning her.

Although Edna’s motives for suicide are more ambiguous, no more than Emma’s is her suicide caused by one or another failed relationship. Edna knows that wholeness is not within her range of possibilities, which are limited by the social

conventions imposed on her as a woman and the temporal constraints of being human.

She rejects dependency on anyone for definition, as she thinks,

To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me. . . .

She even realized that the day would come when [Robert], too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. . . .

She thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul. (113-114)

A subtle difference is that Emma never comes to the realization that “to-morrow it will be someone else,” a conscious apprehension by Edna that it is not a particular lover who has brought her to this moment.

Although Edna’s conscious effort is to “think of the children” (110), she knows she could “never sacrifice herself for her children” (48, 113), and now the two boys

appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days. (113)

Here Chopin inserts the one line that might imply an intentional suicide; “she knew a way to elude them” (113). Rather than escaping the grief of a failed relationship, Edna escapes being possessed “body and soul” by any human being as she escapes her own limitations as a human being by quitting her existence.

Edna’s suicide is not as definitively premeditated as is Emma’s. After her return to Grand Isle, and immediately before her fatal swim, she asks Victor about dinner:

“What time will you have dinner?” asked Edna. “I’m very hungry; but don’t get anything extra.

“ . . . do you know, I have a notion to go down to the beach and take a good wash and even a little swim before dinner? . . .

“ . . . I’d better go right away so as to be back in time.” (112)

This scene may imply that, rather than intending suicide, she intended simply to pass the time until dinner. On the other hand, by saying “don't get anything extra” she could be indicating her awareness that she will not return. A third and most likely possibility is that Edna herself is not fully aware of her intentions.

As Edna swims further into the sea, she reaches a point at which she knows she is not strong enough to turn back. She recalls mastering her fear when she learned to swim, and unlike Emma, who grew afraid, at this point Edna is no longer afraid. Whether her death is premeditated or not, she acquiesces to it, allowing the sea to seduce her, to possess her, in a way she has not allowed any person to possess her:

The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft close embrace.

She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue grass meadow. . . .

. . . It was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone. (113-114)

Although we are constantly in Edna's consciousness in her final moments, we come away unsure of her intentions, just as she may be unsure of her own intentions, in a way we are never unsure of Emma's intentions.

Flaubert's narrator does not suggest the possibility of Emma or anyone emerging from a meaningless life, only of acquiring an awareness of its meaninglessness. In contrast, we see Edna, through Chopin's sympathetic, subjective narrator, in a way we never see Emma. Edna's awareness is open to us until her death because we have not been denied awareness of her motive forces as she experiences them. The ambiguity of her final motive gives us the sense that she, too, feels ambivalence. Chopin's sympathetic narrator offers the more self-conscious Edna the

tools to a growing self-recognition. Neither protagonist survives, but the reader feels more sympathy for Edna than for Emma. The greater sympathy we feel for Edna is evoked by the interior apprehension of her “awakening” provided by the sympathetic narrator.

Flaubert gives us an exhaustive account of Emma, but like all great novelists, he writes against the implications of his own genre. Despite his conscious intention to explain all, Flaubert could never satisfactorily explain Emma’s motivating force within the genre. Nothing Flaubert tells us, in all his external, clinical details of Emma, ever fully explains or even probes what force moves her. In light of *The Awakening*, we may presume that it is a force like the one that moves Edna. The ultimate outcome, of which Flaubert is certainly aware, is that, even with a full psychological accounting of a person, something of that person is left over and unaccounted for. We are left with the paradox of knowing all yet not knowing all about Emma. Even though Flaubert does not overtly invite our sympathy, we come away sympathetic to Emma, whose lack of growth in the face of reality results in her futile death by suicide.

It is likely that Chopin, too, was sympathetic to Emma and that she expressed that sympathy in her response to Flaubert. She asks the hypothetical question, “What if Emma were to grow in awareness?” In her dialogic engagement, she makes us conscious of Edna’s motivating forces through an internal perspective of Edna’s growing awareness. Clearly Edna is “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Wrestlings of her mind could be wrestlings of our minds. We come away profoundly sympathetic to Edna who, even though she grows in awareness, is no more able to escape temporal limitations than is Emma able to find her romantic vision.

Conclusion

“It Matters All”

A little more or less of health?
What does it matter!
A little more or less of wealth?
A boon to scatter!
But more or less of love your own to call,
It matters all!
(*Works* 728-29)

My study of Chopin’s historical placement within the development of literary realism and naturalism contributes to current scholarship by situating her works in the context of writers with whom she interacts. Margaret Donovan Bauer argues that “an analysis of a . . . writer’s work *should* include . . . the relation of the work to what has preceded it, indeed has apparently played some role in its existence in being” (21).

Bakhtin attests to the essential creativity of such “intertextuality”:

When such an influence is deep and productive, there is no external imitation, no simple act of reproduction, but rather a further creative development of another’s . . . discourse in a new context and under new conditions. (Bakhtin 347)

A study of such influence on Chopin and of her creative dialogues with others’ works has not previously been undertaken.

By focusing on Chopin’s “intertextuality,” we come to a fuller understanding of her motives and formal intentions. By attending to her historical placement, we can better understand her concerns in variance with other authors. We discover first that, though she eliminated sentimentalism as her writing matured, she was unwilling to let go of romance elements she found in such novels as Aguilar’s *The Days of Bruce*. Additionally, her consistently subjective narrator removes narrative authority as it intensifies our involvement with characters and validates the marginalized voice.

Finally, though her Catholicism became tempered by her reading of Darwin and the philosophers, something of her religious training remains in her sense of love as a divine and perennial force in our lives. From a perspective illuminated by such influences, she questioned ideologies inherent in the literary forms she selectively appropriated or rejected. By examining Chopin's diaries, criticism, and fiction, we can document her conscious reconsiderations of works first by American then by French masters. Her acknowledged interaction with other writers reveals her sense of the constancy and continuity of the essential characteristics of human nature and experience, though these characteristics are always unfolding and being observed in new conditions and circumstances.

My examination of Chopin's intertextuality, then, is consistent with Chopin's own sense that a writer must study "true art" as well as "true life" (*Works* 692). Only by applying Chopin's sense of the continuous and essential nature of human emotions, motives, and desires as it is manifest throughout the literature that preceded hers can we then grasp the essence of Chopin.

Responding first to American writers, Chopin disagreed with Hamlin Garland's assertion that good writers "put aside all models, even living writers" (*Crumbling* 24). Garland argued that "individuality in authorship" demands "freedom from past models" (21); instead, "each locality must produce its own literary record" (22). In his view, the greatness even of the ancient classics resides in their local color:

The charm of Horace is the side light he throws on the manners and customs of his time. The vital in Homer lies . . . in his local color, not in his abstractions.

Similarly, it is the local color of Chaucer that interests us today.
(*Crumbling* 57-58)

In contrast, Chopin, who critiqued *Crumbling Idols*, more likely would have asserted as the basis of these writers' greatness and continuing interest their perennial themes and symbolic concerns, especially their expression of the elementary passions. She might well have noted the features of "local color" in their works, but almost certainly she would have attended particularly to their characters' desires, ambitions, deceptions and self-deceptions. Chaucer, she might also have noted, presents his characters as on a journey that has no end in this world. She would likely have appreciated that even Homer, with whom recorded Greek mythology begins, and Horace, the Roman poet who alludes often to ancient myth, saw themselves as inexorably linked to a past whose stories they received and passed on. With them, Chopin accepted as given an unbreakable constancy and continuity in "true life" that produces a like constancy and continuity in "true art." Since an aspect of experience is expressible only in the analogical language of art, she understood that art must be looked to when searching into the depths of human spirit. Adhering to this more ancient tradition, Chopin values the immutable and perennial nature of love and other human impulses, arguing in her critique of *Crumbling Idols*:

Human impulses do not change and can not so long as men and women continue to stand in the relation to one another which they have occupied since our knowledge of their existence began. (*Works* 693)

Virginia Woolf shared Chopin's sense of the continuity of experience and its expression in art, explaining that "books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" (80). Eudora Welty, too, asserts that continuity and "confluence" (113) inform her own stories:

The stories were connected most provocatively to all of me, perhaps through the entry into my story-telling mind of another sort of tie—a

shadowing of Greek mythological figures, gods and heroes that wander in various guises, at various times, in and out, emblems of the characters' heady dreams. (Welty 108)

These writers share a sense of the continuity of experience that makes it necessary to study and emulate the works of other writers and times, back even to the earliest traditions, and thereby to situate or "locate" one's own work. Of this need Chopin was acutely aware.

A reason why Howells and Garland and the writers for whom they spoke wished to break with writers and works of the past, including particularly many of their contemporaries in France, may be found in Garland's assertion—echoing Howells—that in American realism, "life is to be depicted, not love life. . . . Life is in continual process of change, and in conformity to these social and individual changes the drama has always changed and must always change" (*Crumbling* 101). Chopin, of course, considered the "primitive passions" (*Works* 693) to be the unvarying constant of human experience. She believed particularly that love is at once both a natural and "divine" impulse (*Private Papers* 219) that cannot be analyzed and must not be denied. Whereas writers of American realism and determinism hoped to "cure some of the diseases of the American life" (Carter, *Howells* 62), Chopin realized that trying to "cure" humans of their passions was both futile and undesirable. Therefore, when she discovered the "genuine and spontaneous" writing of Maupassant with his emphasis on the "primitive passions," she began to model her stories after his. William Schuyler wrote in 1894 that Chopin now preferred the French writers, "and particularly Maupassant," because they did not have "limitations imposed upon their art by their environment [that] hamper a full and spontaneous expression" (117).

Spontaneity and free expression of the range of human emotions and desires, then, are attributes Chopin finds worth emulating. "Here was life" (*Works* 701), she said, rather than in the "veritism" of Garland (*Crumbling* 24) or the "verity" of Howells (*Criticism* 241).

As Chopin enters into dialogue with the more spontaneous expression of Maupassant, she begins to shift her emphasis from local color. At this juncture, she is in the process of mastering her craft. Fusco illuminates for us Chopin's emulation of Maupassant's structure. Fusco demonstrates that Chopin "felt [Maupassant's] influence more keenly and perceptively than any other American writer of her day" (101). By placing Chopin's stories in the context of Maupassant's, Fusco draws our attention to the complex structure of Chopin's stories. Yet for Chopin, as for Maupassant, structure remains flexible rather than prescriptive. Like Maupassant, she uses structure as a means of expression. Within the structures of her stories, she strives to represent the uncontrollable, spontaneous force of love and other elemental passions as they erupt in human life.

If we follow the natural course of Chopin's maturation through her finest work, her reconsideration of *Madame Bovary*, then, much as Fusco does by juxtaposing her stories against stories of Maupassant, we may illuminate *The Awakening* in the context of Flaubert's novel. Although such a juxtaposition is often alluded to, no one has situated *The Awakening* as a considered, detailed response to Flaubert's portrayal of Emma. In so doing, we see even more clearly Chopin's complex awareness of the motive forces operating in Edna that brought her to her moment of death. We are not

as able to sympathize with or even to see those forces in Flaubert's portrayal of Emma, though certainly they exist.

The wide variance of criticism concerning Edna's motives as she walks into the sea testifies to the ambiguity of Chopin's ending. While Chopin implies there is a border at which the motivating force of a divine impulse ends and a counter force of human willfulness (such as Emma's) begins, she never draws the line for her narrator, for Edna, or for the reader. We get the sense that, in regard to Edna, Chopin had not resolved the issue for herself, making her portrayal even more poignant. Such ambivalence raises an issue not implicit in Flaubert's ending for Emma. We are profoundly attuned to Edna's internality, we sense that her awakening and growth are right and proper, and we sympathize with her departure from conventional morals in a way we are not able to sympathize with Emma. On the other hand, we would much prefer an ending in which Edna's awakening did not result in her death. We finish reading the novel with the unsettling recognition that the growth we approve of has resulted finally in what we find profoundly disturbing, Edna's death. We come away puzzled at what, in Edna's view, brings her to that hopeless, defiant moment.

Chopin's original title, "A Solitary Soul," draws attention to the dichotomy of Edna's experience of awakening. As she awakens, she can no longer identify with anyone or anything in the world; she becomes utterly "solitary." Chopin, who always insisted on the constancy and continuity of human experience, certainly recognized that the modern sensibility portrayed in Edna has made a break with the human community. Perhaps we can glimpse into Chopin's sense of herself in relation to Edna

if we return to her acknowledgement of her own growth to “wisdom.” Her statement bears repeating in its entirety:

If it were possible for my husband and my mother to come back to earth, I feel that I would unhesitatingly give up everything that has come into my life since they left it and join my existence again with theirs. To do that, I would have to forget the past ten years of my growth—my real growth. But I would take back a little wisdom with me; it would be the spirit of perfect acquiescence. (*Private Papers* 183)

Chopin implies that she has grown to the realization that the conditions of mortal existence include yearning. She would gladly return to a past she yearns for, but not as the same person who originally experienced it. Now she has the added “wisdom . . . of perfect acquiescence” to forces acting in her, so that she can acquiesce to the good of mortal existence experienced, paradoxically, in its limitations. Although Edna, too, grows in awareness, she never acquires such wisdom. The implication is that Edna grows only to an awareness of the yearning in her life that cannot be fulfilled by any person or thing. After her “first-felt throbbings of desire” (*Awakening* 31) for Robert,

she slept but a few hours. They were troubled hours, disturbed with dreams that were intangible, that eluded her, leaving only an impression upon her half-awakened senses of something unattainable.
(33)

In essence, Edna remains only “half-awakened,” never aware that while something is, indeed, “unattainable” in mortal existence, acquiescence to that yearning as a condition of being human could finally dispel her isolation and hopelessness.

In the narrator’s words, Edna’s awakening and growth are marked when she begins

to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight. . . .

But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled and chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!

(*Awakening* 15)

Edna's profound dilemma is that acquiring such wisdom is painful, and the pain attendant on her awakening has been too great to grow beyond. Never emerging "from such beginning," her soul perishes "in its tumult."

Chopin's subjective apprehension of Edna's dilemma contributes essentially to soft naturalism. Departing from objective realism, she demonstrates that a dimension of reality, Flaubert's "*réel écrit*," cannot be expressed through a "correspondence between words and reality" (Watt 14). Rather, that dimension can better be expressed through analogical language. She acknowledges that Edna's "relation to the world within and about her" is "a ponderous weight of wisdom." However, departing from deterministic naturalism, she implies that Edna's and, by implication, our hope lay in acquiescing to the conditions of mortal existence, a conscious choice not possible in determinism. Such wisdom is never made available to Emma.

In revealing the dilemma of Edna's temporal existence, a revelation denied to readers of *Madame Bovary*, Chopin has achieved Bakhtin's sense that here is "no simple act of reproduction, but rather a further creative development . . . in a new context and under new conditions" (347). Chopin has opened our awareness to what is human, hence to what is perennial in Edna's condition. She has elicited from us sympathy for Edna that she, too, must have felt profoundly and personally. In a sense,

she has invited us to love Edna as she must have loved her: “Much to do; . . . but what cannot love do?” (*Works* 873).

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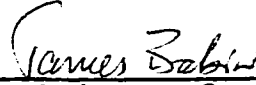

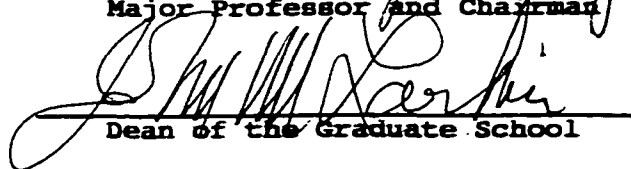
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

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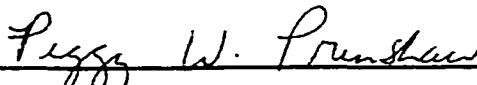
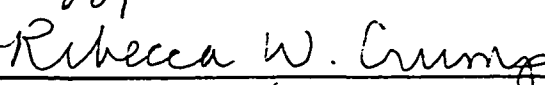


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